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PSP™
PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION® 3

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - Australia

OFFICIAL VERDICT!

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Resistance team's incredible new Ratchet & Clank sequel!

FIRST REVIEW!

Call of Duty 4

MODERN WARFARE

THE GAME OF THE YEAR HAS ARRIVED!

PS2 ESSENTIALS

Spyro, Spider-Man: FOF and the rest of the year's big hits reviewed inside!

OFFICIAL VERDICT!

HDTV ROUNDUP

Cutting-edge HD screens reviewed and rated!

FREE
SIMPSONS
STICKER!

REVIEW EXPLOSION!

- Call of Duty 4 • Guitar Hero III
- Ratchet & Clank Future • Conan
- The Simpsons • Tony Hawk's 9
- Jericho • Spider-Man: FOF
- Pursuit Force 2 & more!

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ISSUE 10 DECEMBER 2007
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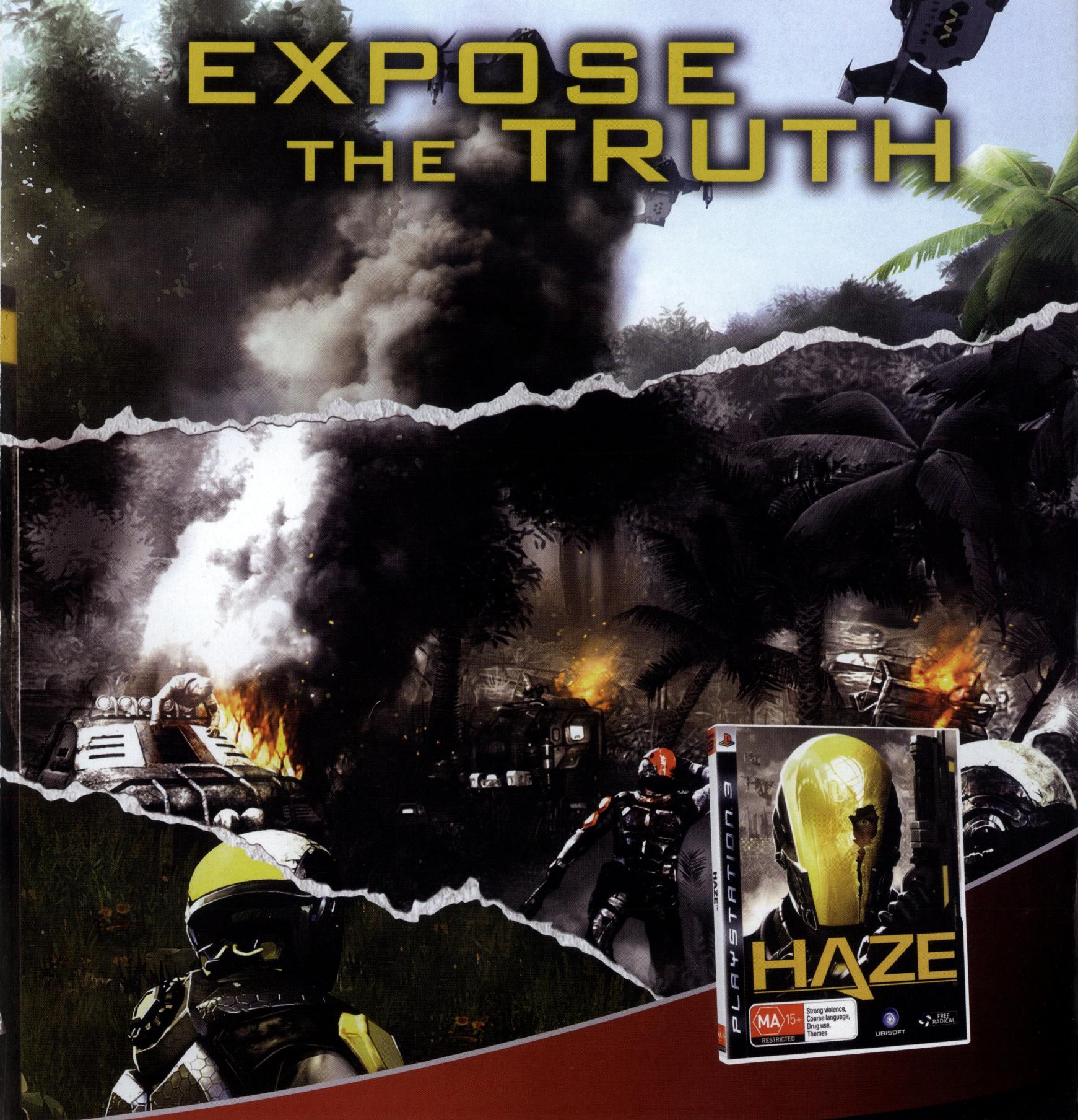
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Harvey Norman

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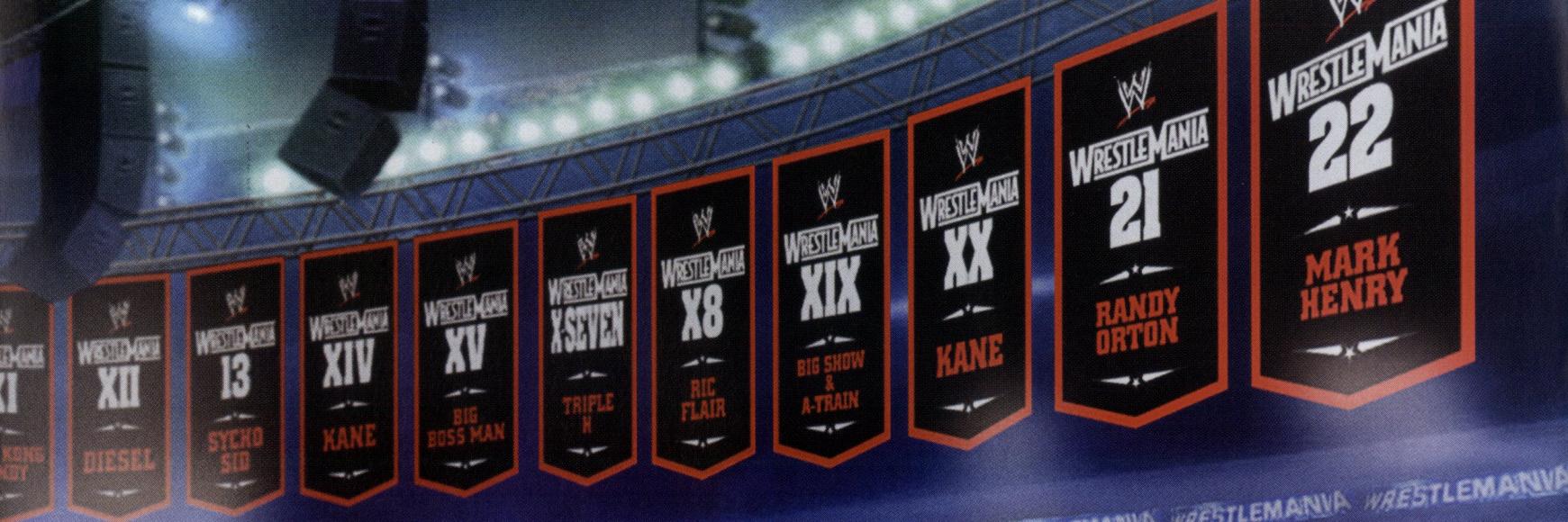
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CONTENTS



COVER STORY

76 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Infinity Ward's genre-busting, cutting-edge combat game is here and we've got the first review!

NEWS



14 BUZZ

PS3's first rumble-equipped controller, the \$699 40GB PS3, *MotorStorm 2*, game delays, Colin McRae's tragic passing and more.

PS3 REVIEW



82 Ratchet & Clank Future: ToD

From the talented team behind *Resistance* comes the new sequel to the PS2's greatest platformers.

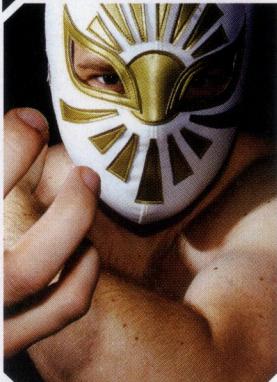
PS2 REVIEW



104 Spider-Man: Friend or Foe

There may not be a new Spidey movie but that hasn't stopped Activision cracking out a new game for the kids.

FEATURE



68 Ready to Rumble

It's time to finally settle the long-standing gaming grudge matches. Find out who the real heroes are!

PSP PREVIEW



112 Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice

Bigbig Studios has cranked out a cracking sequel to its blockbuster PSP car-hopping blast-a-thon.

FEATURE



32 Assassin's Creed

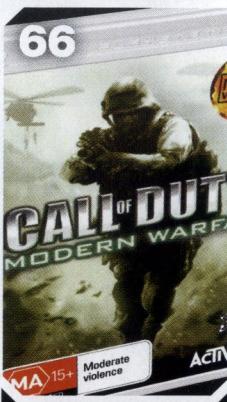
After four years in the making Ubisoft has finally peeled back the hood to reveal its incredible game.

FEATURES



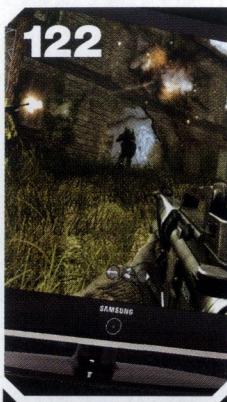
Gaming Rip-offs

The pain explained



Reader Survey

Help us and win!



Huge HDTV

Buyer's Guide



Need for Speed

ProStreet

PS3

40 PREVIEWS

- 40 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008
- 42 The Bourne Conspiracy
- 43 Highlander
- 44 Turning Point: Fall of Liberty
- 46 Soul Calibur IV
- 47 Turok

75 REVIEWS

- 51 The Simpsons Game
- 76 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 82 Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction
- 88 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock
- 92 Tony Hawk's Proving Ground
- 94 FIFA 08
- 96 Bladestorm
- 98 Clive Barker's Jericho
- 100 Conan
- 102 The Eye of Judgement
- 103 Madden NFL 08

PS2

50 PREVIEWS

- 50 Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 2

104 REVIEWS

- 104 Spider-Man: Friend or Foe
- 106 Spyro: The Eternal Night
- 107 Jackass: The Game
- 107 MotoGP 07
- 108 Warriors Orochi
- 108 Ben 10
- 108 Madden NFL 08
- 110 GrimGrimoire
- 110 SingStar Rock Ballads
- 111 Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights
- 111 Stuntman: Ignition

PSP

50 PREVIEWS

- 50 Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

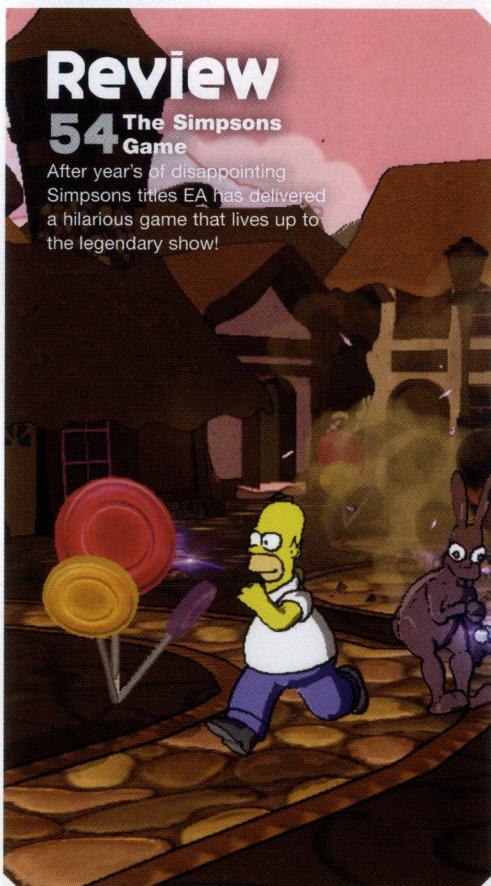
112 REVIEWS

- 112 Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice
- 114 Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron
- 116 Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles
- 117 Dead Head Fred
- 117 Alien Syndrome

Review

54 The Simpsons Game

After year's of disappointing Simpsons titles EA has delivered a hilarious game that lives up to the legendary show!



Comps

20 WIN! WIN!
WIN! WIN!

This month you can win a PS3, plus Beowulf, Assassin's Creed and Kane & Lynch games!

WIN!

REGULARS

| | | | |
|------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| 008 | Editor's letter | 075 | Reviews |
| 014 | Buzz | 118 | Film |
| 026 | Subs | 122 | Tech |
| 028 | Letters | 126 | Cheats |
| 040 | Previews | 128 | Database |
| 072 | Online | 130 | Next Issue |

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EDITOR'S LETTER



...the \$699 price point will be the red flag many PlayStation fans have been waiting to charge into."

Those sly dogs at Sony. After denying there'd be a Christmas price cut for PS3 until they were blue in the face, October 11 rolled around and BAM – the new 40GB PS3 went on-sale for \$699. Sure, the 40GB model is missing a few of the bells and whistles boasted by its 60GB big brother, namely backwards compatibility, direct media card access and two USB ports instead of four, but there's no denying the \$699 price point will be the red flag many PlayStation fans have been waiting to charge into.

Although the lack of backwards compatibility means you'll need to hold onto your PS2 rather than trading it, I can honestly tell you the rest of the differences between the 40GB and 60GB models aren't worth worrying about. I've got a healthy haul of music, HD trailers and game demos on my PS3 and have never once filled more than 30GB. \$699 is a great move for PS3 but we can't help but hope that Sony continues to make the PS3 even more competitive in 2008, especially considering the 40GB sells for \$379 AUD in Japan and \$443 AUD in North America. Nitpicking aside, with all of its cutting-edge gaming and Blu-ray tech, and the huge range of utterly amazing new games being released this season it's a great time to get your own PS3 party started.

NARAYAN PATTISON, Editor

PS3 online: [The_Duude](#)

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - Australia

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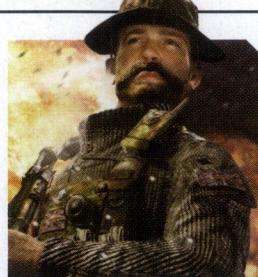
SHOUT OUTS: Facebook – perfect
for our 'too lazy to phone'
generation :: German beer :: Joe
Gattelari, enjoy your games and get
well soon mate :: Colin McRae

Our military call-signs explained...

LUKE REILLY

It took me a long time to think of one that wasn't used in a Vietnam War movie, a Matthew Reilly novel or *Top Gun*. Eventually I settled on 'Black Beard', because this picture has one. And I'm a pirate. On weekends.

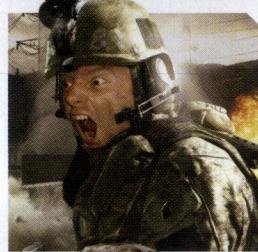
Online: [Capt_Flashheart](#)



MARK SERRELS

They call me the 'Pain Train' – cause I bring the pain, fool! And I love trains. Especially the big red steam engine ones that travel through the countryside, like in *Harry Potter*. Yep, now I sound gay...

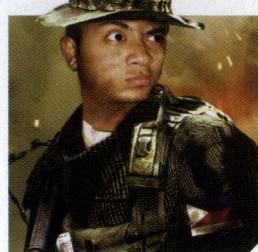
Online: [Serrels](#)



PHILLIP JORGE

'Mr Loverman', cause I love that Shabba Ranks song, with all the naked chicks in the video. "Mr Loverman... SHABBA!" Also because I'm a lover of men... wait a minute, that's not right – delete! (Too late Phill – ED.)

Online: [PhiLLipO](#)



ADAM MATHEW

"Brown Underpants." It's a mystery why command issued this call-sign. It's true my bowels empty during messy firefights but the name isn't accurate. As a commando – I'm always "going commando".

Online: [YourmumsAWESOME](#)



ANTHONY O'CONNOR

"The Shooty-Shoot-Death-Kill-Explodes-the-Enemy-and-uses-Harsh-Language... Man." I could tell you why but then I'd have to slit open your stomach and strangle you with your own intestines.

Online: [stoxys242](#)

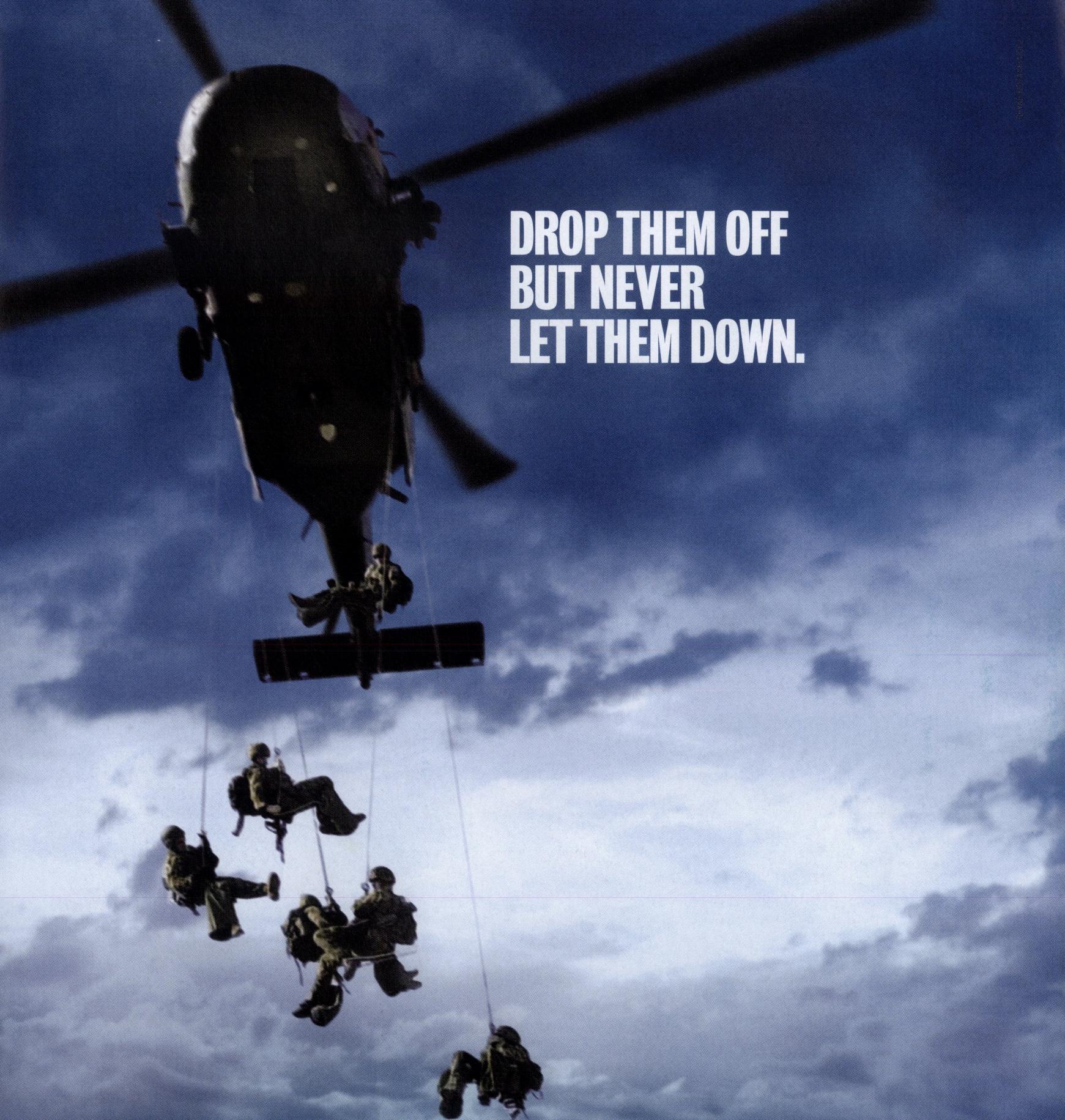


JAMES ELLIS

"Uniball." I scored this pearly on a trip to Las Vegas when I happened to spot Jessica Alba. I instinctively groped her rear before a bodyguard kicked one nut out of my pouch. So worth it.

Online: [gtfaster49](#)





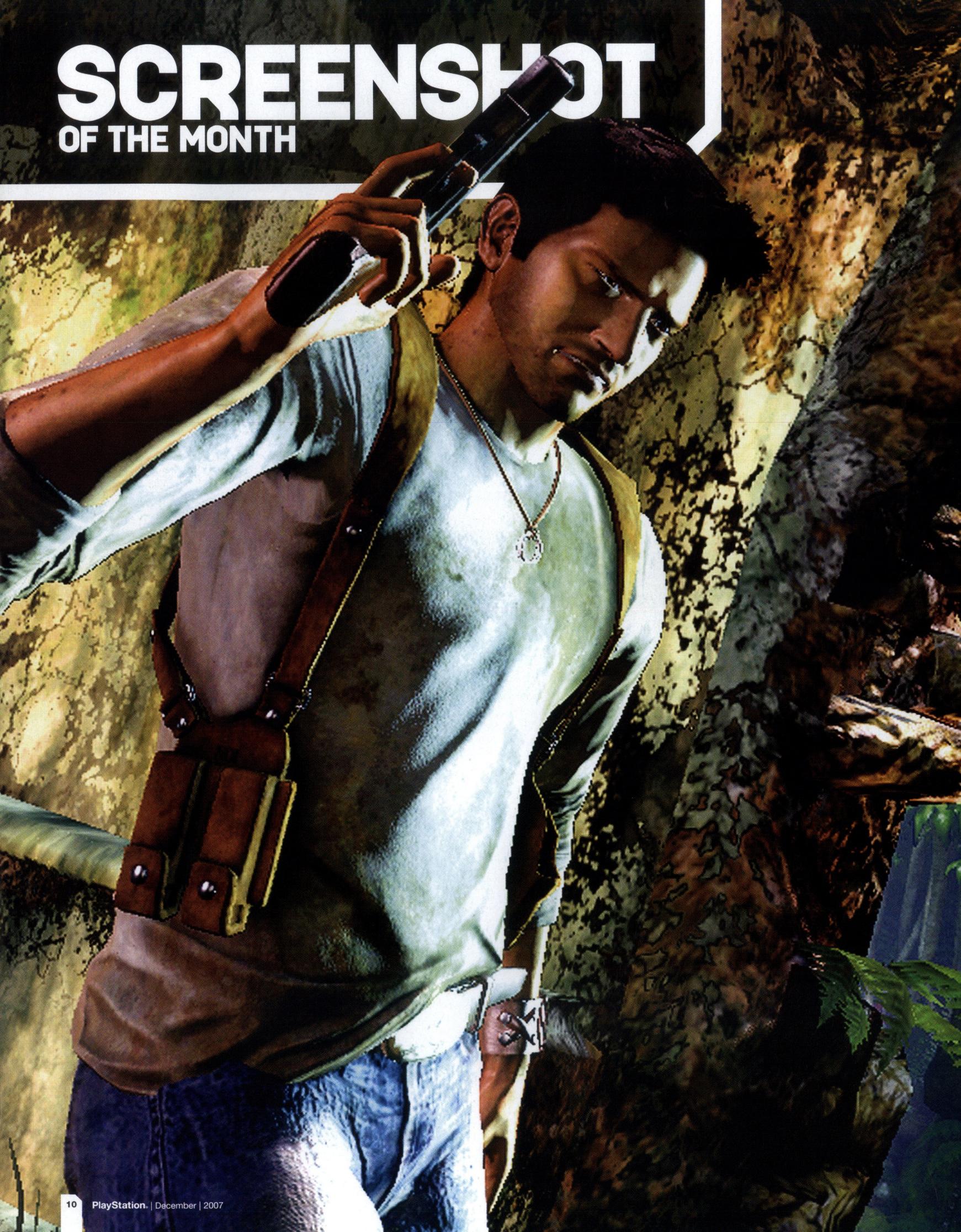
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SCREENSHOT OF THE MONTH





■ Pirates: way less cool than they used to be

■ They just don't speak the same anymore. Or English, for that matter

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune is shaping up to be a monster, mixing the magnificent screen acting seen in *Heavenly Sword* with the exploration of *Tomb Raider*, plus some serious firepower. Look for this game early December...

Every Battle Counts



PlayStation 2

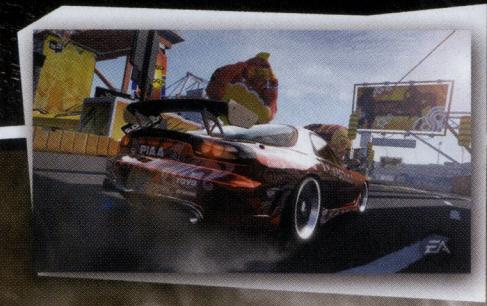
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BUZZ

The **Dual Shock 3** is finally announced in Tokyo, while numerous games receive dreaded delays. Bizarre Creations go multiformat, and much, much more...

STOP THE PRESS!

40GB PS3!

At the exact moment we were preparing to send this issue to print some excellent news reached our desks. The murmurs of a PS3 price drop proved to be half true as a new 40GB PS3, priced at \$699.95 was confirmed by Sony. It has none of the 60GB's memory card slots, has only two USB ports, and is not backwards compatible with the PS2, but all the other features remain...



PS3 PS2 PSP

RUMBLE YOUNG MAN RUMBLE!

Kaz Hirai announces DualShock 3 in Tokyo

In Japan, at the Tokyo Games Show, Kaz Hirai finally officially unveiled the DualShock 3 controller for the PS3, adding rumble to the motion-sensing SIXAXIS game pad.

It's been a long time coming, but with the technological difficulties of combining rumble and motion-sensing resolved and the legal difficulties quashed, Sony is now free to give us what we wanted all along: vibration baby!

The list of games compatible with the rumble feature has well and truly exceeded our expectations. While it's a given that unreleased games will be able to use the feature, since they're still in development, we were surprised to

see that even *MotorStorm* – a launch title – will be able to take full advantage of this feature. We were also surprised to see a bunch of unannounced titles on the list. Very interesting...

These games will require a small downloadable patch, however we feel it's a small price to pay for some rumble in the jungle time with the new dual shock. To the right is a comprehensive list of games compatible with the new controller.

The DualShock 3 will be available in Japan in November, whereas Australia, Europe, and the US will have to wait until early next year in Autumn 2008.



Let's Rumble

* Games requiring a downloadable patch.

- The Darkness
- Enemy Territory: Quake Wars
- Soldier of Fortune
- Resident Evil 5
- Devil May Cry 4
- N-Cube
- Warbit
- Dark Sector
- Turok
- Highlander
- Kane & Lynch
- Burnout
- Paradise
- FIFA franchise
- To End All Wars
- Rage
- WarDevil
- Dynasty
- Warriors 6
- MGS4: Guns of the Patriots
- Blacksite: Area 51
- TNA Wrestling
- The Wheelman
- Unreal
- Tournament 3
- Cops
- Planet One
- Heroes over Europe
- Condemned 2
- Iron Man
- The Club
- The Crucible
- The Incredible Hulk
- Blast Factor*
- Echochrome
- Elefunk
- Folklore*
- Formula One Championship Edition
- Go! Sports Ski*
- Heavenly Sword*
- High Velocity
- Bowling
- MLB 08: The Show
- MotorStorm*
- NBA 08*
- Pain
- Rat Race
- Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction
- Resistance: Fall of Man*
- Snakeball
- SOCOM: Confrontation
- Super Stardust HD*
- Uncharted: Drake's Fortune
- Warhawk*
- Wipeout HD
- GripShift
- NBA 2K8
- Destroy All Humans! 3
- Stuntman: Ignition
- Assassin's Creed
- Beowulf
- Haze
- GRAW2*
- Rainbow Six Vegas*
- Prototype
- The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

COLIN McRAE 1968 – 2007

Motor sports legend passes away

Colin McRae, former World Rally Champion, and the inspiration behind the *Colin McRae Rally* games, passed away on September 16 in a helicopter crash near his home in Lanarkshire, Scotland.

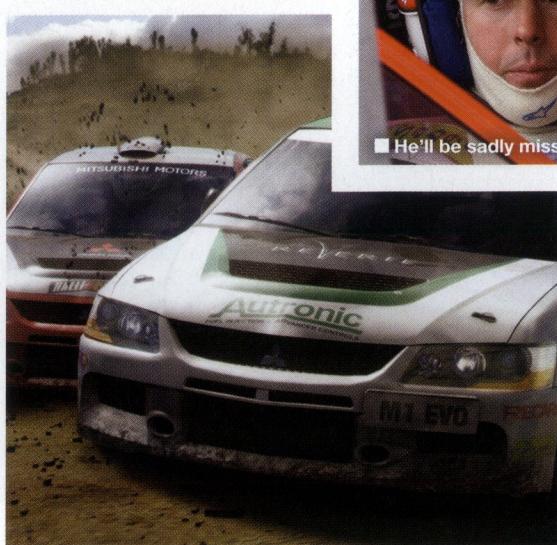
McRae, an accomplished pilot, was at the helm when the chopper went down; sadly his five year-old son, his six year-old friend, and an associate of McRae, were also in the helicopter at the time, and none survived the impact.

Codemasters, the team behind the successful games series released this statement of condolence:

"Everyone at Codemasters, especially those who worked directly with Colin McRae, is deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic events of this weekend.

"The loss of Colin McRae is deeply distressing. That it involved his son and another so young makes it even more tragic. Our thoughts are with his family and those closest to him and we share in their pain... we are heavy of heart at his passing but we are also brimming with pride at knowing him and to have played a small role in his life.

"He will never be forgotten by all at Codemasters."



WHAT THEY SAID... THE 'EXCUSES' EDITION

"Please be patient"

Not really an excuse, in fact Sony head honcho Kaz Hirai didn't really have an excuse for the *Home* delay, and everyone kind of forgot to ask him about it...

"...we wanted to time it more closely to the movie. But then we realised that we don't have a movie, so we just said, "Aww hell, let's just make the game better". It's really that simple - we don't want to slop out a game just to meet a deadline."

Pandemic co-founder Josh Resnick tries to joke his way out of explaining why *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* has slipped into next year. You're a funny guy Josh... that's why we're going to kill you last...

"You could argue we gave you 1280 pixels of vertical resolution, since *Halo 3* uses not one, but two frame buffers - both of which render at 1152x640 pixels. The reason we chose this slightly unorthodox resolution and this very complex use of two buffers is simple enough to see - lighting."

Blah blah blah. Luke Smith of Bungie scrambles in an attempt to justify and make sense of the fact that *Halo 3*, in actual fact, isn't really rendered in true high definition...

MOTORSTORM 2 CONFIRMED!



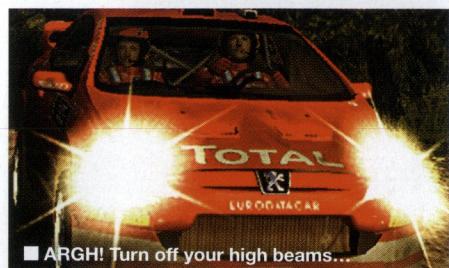
Despite the fact that details are absolutely super scarce at the moment, we feel it's our duty to let you know that Evolution studios, the team behind the original *MotorStorm* is currently hard at work on a sure to be awesome sequel.

That's right, *MotorStorm 2* is on the way, and while we have no details on a release date,

or any screenshots to speak of, you can be sure the same winning formula of the original will no doubt be replicated in *MotorStorm 2*.

In addition, Evolution studios is currently in the process of polishing off some new downloadable content for distribution on the PlayStation Network. As soon as we hear of a release date for this content, we'll let you know.

As a result of Evolution's stellar contribution to the PlayStation in recent years, with *MotorStorm* and *WRC*, Sony has recently purchased Evolution Studios, and its subsidiary Bigbig Studios (responsible for the excellent *Pursuit Force* series on PSP). Look forward to many more classics from both these teams appearing exclusively on Sony platforms soon.



■ ARGH! Turn off your high beams...

WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

Call Of Duty 4

How awesome can one game be?



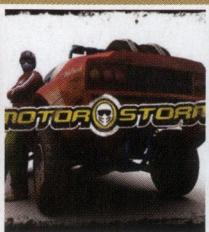
PSP SALES

Through the roof due to *Crisis Core: FFVII*



MOTORSTORM 2

Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, hurry up... Next month - promise!



ASSASSIN'S CREED

Stupid delayed review.



TONY HAWK'S

Come on Tony! You're better than this!



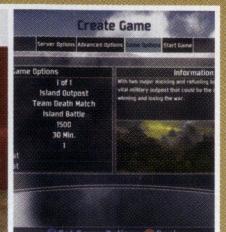
DELAYS

So many game delays, lazy buggers...



WARHAWK NIGHT

Disasterous... we blame Sony's dumb servers



HOT!

NOT!

INFO NUDGE

Everything else that's fit to print (and some that's not)

CHINESE WHISPERS

Damn, those *Final Fantasy VII* remake rumors just won't go away, will they? Japanese mag *Famitsu* started quite possibly the largest game of Chinese whispers ever conceived when it suggested a game

would be announced at TGS that would push PS3 sales through the roof. Pretty innocuous, huh? Well by the time this rumour had circulated round the net, apparently Sony had confirmed a *Final Fantasy VII* remake was in the works, fully funded by Sony themselves. Sadly, this was not true, and no such announcement was made: you'll have to hold your breath some more for this game.



EGAMES EXHIBITION

Anyone who was anyone in Melbourne managed to make their way out to the super successful eGames exhibition last year, but if you happen to be a nobody and missed out last time round, now is your chance to repent. Yep, eGames has returned for 2007 at the Melbourne exhibition centre, running from November 16 through to Sunday 19. A whole bunch of the newest PS3 games will be available to play.



THE PRICE IS WRONG, BITCH!

While the expected price drop announcement went, um... unannounced at TGS, rumours abound that such a drop will still go ahead sooner rather than later. A price drop in the US is said to be imminent, as Sony readies a 40GB specific PS3 at a lower price point. Whether this price drop will actually happen, or even find its way to our shores, remains to be seen; at this point Sony claims the rumours are just that, rumours. Time will no doubt tell.



PSP DAYO!

The PSP has been on a bit of a roll lately, fighting the good fight against the DS which, in Japan at least, has dominated hardware sales for some time now. A combination of the Japanese release of *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, and the new PSP slim have pushed sales through the roof, peaking at 250,000 for its launch week. In case you didn't know, that's a whole lot of moolah! Here's hoping this will speed up the release of *Crisis Core* to our shores, and possibly alert Sony to the power of *Final Fantasy VII* - where's our PS3 remake?!



Home, *Mercenaries 2*, *Brothers in Arms Hell's Highway*, and *UT3* all delayed until 2008... Man, can't anyone get their games in on time these days? During his TGS keynote speech, newly installed Sony top dog Kaz Hirai announced a depressing delay for the *Home*, the 'game' that's set to revolutionise online communication on the PlayStation 3.

While it's disappointing, like most delays we'd rather see the product achieving its full potential, as opposed to being released as a buggy mess. With *Home* being one of the most ambitious online projects of all time, the time required to make all the unique components work in harmony is considerable. Kaz Hirai urged everyone to "be patient", and we echo those sentiments.

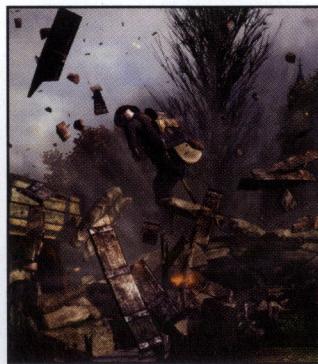
Ubisoft also recently announced that the hotly anticipated *Brothers in Arms Hell's Highway* has also been delayed (essentially a delay of a delay, since the game was supposed to come out early this year).

Now Ubisoft has projected a March 2008 release for the game that looks set to steal *Call of Duty's* WWII shooter crown. Again, this is a disappointing delay, but perhaps a welcome one, since we're struggling for time and money for all the awesome games coming out this Christmas.

But wait there's more. The soon to be awesome *Mercenaries 2* has also been hit by the delay curse, with its release date now creeping into 2008. No real reason was given for this delay, but the complex mechanics of the game's incredibly destructive environments no doubt played some part.

Finally, a game we have been following since it was announced, *Unreal Tournament 3*, has also been delayed. While the PC version should make it into stores in time for Christmas, the PS3 iteration, with additional content, has slipped into 2008.

Expect all of the games at some point in 2008, hopefully... (sigh).



BIRD'S EYE VIEW

If a major games publisher approached me to be the face of their new rally game, I would politely, but firmly, decline.

I'm not really the superstitious type but the absolutely tragic death

of Scottish racing legend and former WRC champion Colin McRae makes him the third rally driver in recent memory who have both endorsed a videogame and passed away.

Richard Burns, British rally driver and former WRC champion, had the tough, and extremely realistic, *Richard Burns Rally*. Richard Burns died in late 2005, losing his battle against a brain tumour.

New Zealander Possum

HOW BIZARRE...

In a controversial move, Activision recently announced the purchase of UK based developer Bizarre Creations. "This is crappy business news," we hear you cry. "What the hell is it doing in our hallowed mag?"

Well it's pretty big news if you're a fan of driving games, since Bizarre is the brains behind the *Project Gotham Racing* series, one of the better franchises on the 360. "But what does this stupid nonsense all mean?" we hear ye complain once again...

Okay, let us break it down for you: previously Bizarre had a 'relationship' with Microsoft, which meant that Bizarre's admittedly awesome games were usually 360 exclusives – damn it! Now, however, Bizarre's games will most likely be multiformat, meaning that there's a strong chance we'll probably see some sweet driving titles from Activision in the near future.



Totally bizarre...

PS3 PS2 PSP

SPACED

You are Isaac Clarke, an engineer sent into the farthest depths of space on a routine mission to fix the comms system in a deep space mining ship, when you find the entire crew ravaged by an alien infestation. This is the plot of *Dead Space*, a survival horror game recently announced by EA.

"We are all such huge fans of the horror and sci-fi genres," claims executive producer Glen Schofield.

"We wanted to create the most terrifying game we could, and keep the player on the edge of his seat the entire time."

Although info is scarce, this game is due for release in Spring 2008, so we have plenty of time to get our grubby mitts on this. We love the concept, so look for a full preview on *Dead Space* sooner rather than later.

Bourne, winner of the Australian rally Championship seven years in a row, was the local face of *Rally Championship* – a relatively low-profile 2003 rally game. Possum Bourne was killed in a non-competitive car accident in 2003.

People bang on about the 'Madden Curse' (a myth that claims appearing on the cover of a *Madden* game ruins your season). This, however, is far more depressing.



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TOP 10 GAMES CHART

1

FIFA 08

2

Heavenly Sword

3

Colin McRae: DIRT

| Rank | Title | Category | Distributor |
|------|-----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 4 | Warhawk | Action | Sony |
| 5 | Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 | FPS | Ubisoft |
| 6 | Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008 | Sports | EA |
| 7 | Need for Speed Carbon | Driving | EA |
| 8 | Rainbow Six Vegas | FPS | Ubisoft |
| 9 | Call of Duty 3 | FPS | Activision |
| 10 | The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion | RPG | Ubisoft |

RELEASE SCHEDULE

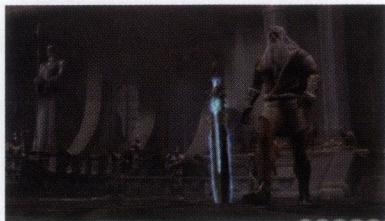


| Format | Title | Category | Distributor |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----------|-------------|
| DECEMBER | | | |
| PS2 | Bee Movie | Action | Activision |
| PS2 | Godzilla Unleashed | Fighting | Atari |
| PSP | Pro Evolution Soccer 2008 | Sports | Atari |
| PS3 | Uncharted: Drake's Fortune | Action | Sony |

| Format | Title | Category | Distributor |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| EARLY 2008 | | | |
| PSP | N+ | Puzzle | Atari |
| PS3 | Turning Point: Fall of Liberty | Action | Atari |
| PSP | Downstream Panic | Puzzle | Atari |
| PSP | Metal Gear Solid: Graphic Novel | Media | Atari |
| PS3 | Turok | FPS | Funtastic |
| PS3 | Frontlines: Fuel of War | FPS | THQ |
| PS3 | Gran Turismo 5 Prologue | Driving | Sony |
| PS3 | Grand Theft Auto IV | Adventure | Rockstar |
| PS3 | Metal Gear Solid 4 | Action | Atari |
| PS3 | Devil May Cry 4 | Action | Activision |
| PS3 | Enemy Territories: Quake Wars | FPS | Activision |
| PS3 | Star Wars: The Force Unleashed | Action | Activision |
| PS3 | Unreal Tournament 3 | FPS | Red Ant |
| PS3 | Tom Clancy's Endwar | RTS | Ubisoft |
| PS3 | Brothers in Arms Hell's Highway | FPS | Ubisoft |

WWW.JBHIFI.COM.AU**JB HI-FI**

TOP TEN: WEAPONS

**1 The Sword of Olympus**

Alright, so *God of War* tops the list two months in a row, but why the hell not? This is the sword that totally killed Athena for goodness sake – whoops! It also took out Zeus... kinda.

**2 The TOW Missile**

This *Warhawk* weapon is a newbie, but damn – this sucker is cooler than the other side of the pillow. Fire this and you can direct the missile itself from a first-person view.

**6 Call of Duty 4 Sniper**

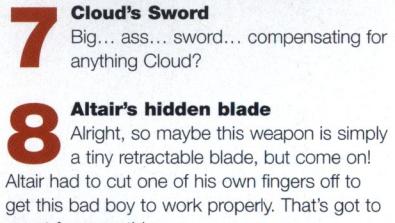
Well, only Naz tried it, but considering it got him so aroused he considered divorcing his wife and marrying the thing (is that legal?) we felt that it was a pretty safe bet.

**3 Hand Cannon**

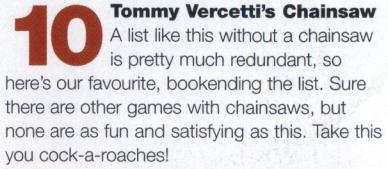
Alright let's get some perspective here. The power of your standard *Resident Evil 4* pistol is ranked as a lowly 1. The power of a fully upgraded Hand Cannon is 100. Yes 100. You could legitimately kill a Brontosaurus with this thing.

**4 The Heavenly Sword**

Forged in the Heavens, this blade is so powerful it sucks the life out of you. However, considering the fact that you can take out roughly 100 dudes with one solitary swipe it's totally worth it. The fact that it's being wielded by a hottie has *nothing* to do with it...

**9 Agent 47's Fibre-Wire**

Sure, it's not really a weapon as such, but who hasn't wanted to straight out garrot someone? Anyone? Well maybe it's just us, but choking someone to death armed with nothing but a garotte wire is hella fun...

**10 Tommy Vercetti's Chainsaw**

A list like this without a chainsaw is pretty much redundant, so here's our favourite, bookending the list. Sure there are other games with chainsaws, but none are as fun and satisfying as this. Take this you cock-a-roaches!

WINNERS

From the comps in OPS #8

DIRT: A Jones, C Martin, C Ingram, K Bruce, D Stott, P Drew, L Braiden, N Cavill, K Frain, J Dunning. **Heavenly Sword:** V Collins, T Mason, H Delmar, A Phillips, D Lowe. **Disturbia:** K Cheng, L Jackson, A Weston, C Rossi, T Ganley, M Lee, E Banks, S Beckel, P Yu, E Utay.



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YOUR CHANCE TO WIN IT ALL...

COMPS

Kane and Lynch,
Assassin's Creed, and
Entourage box sets all
up for grabs!

HITMAN

Agent 47, a genetically engineered assassin, raised from birth to be a cold hearted, efficient killer, has long been the ubiquitous protagonist of the excellent Hitman series of videogames. But now he's making the long awaited leap to the big screen in the anticipated movie adaptation of the long running franchise.

Simply titled *Hitman*, the feature film starts Timothy Olyphant as the unmistakable Agent 47, on the run in the midst of an Eastern European political struggle. Fighting both his unseen enemies and the formation of his fledgling conscience, Agent 47 must find out who is trying to kill him, and for what reason. *Hitman* is only in cinemas from November 22nd, and we recommend that you check this movie out upon release.

Released in conjunction with the movie, comes the *Hitman Triple Pack*, which features *Hitman 2*, *Hitman: Contracts* and *Hitman: Blood Money*, in one package. This game set is the perfect introduction to the franchise and works as excellent background playing in preparation for the upcoming movie.

But also coming from the creators of the *Hitman* franchise is *Kane and Lynch*, for the PS3. An awesome 'buddy' game of

sorts where two polar opposite criminals must work together to ensure their escape from prison remains successful, *Kane and Lynch* looks set to be one of the premiere releases this holiday season.

We're offering an awesome prize package that combines all these outstanding products in one bundle. Listen closely, cause this is where it gets complicated. The first prize is as follows: a copy of the *Hitman Triple Pack* on PS2, a *Hitman* digital watch, a *Hitman* T-shirt, *Hitman* Baseball Cap, two tickets to see the *Hitman* movie, and a copy of *Kane & Lynch* on PS3. Phew, quite a haul.

Ten runners up will receive the following: a copy of *Kane & Lynch*, a copy of the *Hitman Triple Pack*, and two tickets to see the *Hitman* movie. Again, still quite a haul, but there's more. Five more runners up will each receive two tickets to see the *Hitman* movie.

Alright, get all that? Now here's how you enter: in less than 30 words we'd like you to describe the most creative, inventive assassination your grisly mind can come up with. Mark your entries 'Hitman' giveaway and follow entry details on page 22.

PlayStation.2



HITMAN

HITMAN
Digital Watch

WIN!

ATARI

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Mild violence



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ASSASSIN'S CREED

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! That time is almost here (or possibly already here, if you bought this magazine late). Time to get all moist and giggly over the possible game of the year candidate Assassin's Creed.

And why not? If any game was worth getting all hot and bothered over it's Assassin's, redefining action with a unique control system and an entirely reproduced Holy Land that lives and breathes with hundreds, nay thousands, of completely unique characters.

What makes us even more excited, however, is the fact that we have five awesome Assassin's Creed prize packs to give away. These packs include a copy of the game itself (oh my God! Oh my God!), a book detailing the art of the game (considering the effort put into this department, this should be very cool), and an Assassin's Creed hoodie (for your 'pretending to be Altair Enjoyment'). It's an incredible package, and all ye must do to enter is answer one simple

question, and send the answer to us under the headline 'Assassin's giveaway', following the How to Enter instructions on this page.

QUESTION
Assassin's Creed is set during which 'crusade'?

- The 1st Crusade
- The 3rd Crusade
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

HUG IT OUT

Entourage, the super successful show loosely based on actor Mark Wahlberg's life, is on a bit of a roll lately, having been nominated for seven awards at the most recent Emmy's (winning a couple). So now is the perfect chance to get in on the show, with this awesome giveaway courtesy of Warner Bros.

You can get your hands on three packs including the first three series of the show, all by answering one simple question, sending it to us under the tagline 'Entourage giveaway' and following the How To Enter directions on page 20.

QUESTION:
Which Emmy award winning actor plays Ari Gold in the show Entourage?

- Jeremy Irons
- Jeremy Pivons
- Ron Jeremy



SUPERNATURAL

After losing their mother to mysterious demonic force twenty-two years ago, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester's lives have taken different paths. Although both were trained by their father in how to take on and kill the demonic forces of evil, Sam turned his back on the need to hunt the supernatural, while Dean revelled in the task.

But now their Father has gone missing, and the two brothers must work together to find him.

This is the intriguing concept behind *Supernatural*, the latest show from the creator of *The X-Files*. We have four prize packs containing both season one and two of the show, and all you have to do is answer one simple question. Send the answer to us under the headline 'Supernatural giveaway', following the instructions on page 20 to be in with a shout for this fantastic prize.

QUESTION:
What is Sam and Dean's surname?

- Rockchester
- Winchester
- Bigchester



HOW TO ENTER
Send entries to ops@derwenthoward.com.au with the name of the competition in the subject line, or post them to OPS Magazine, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355 with the name of the competition CLEARLY MARKED on the envelope. Alternatively head to www.gameplayer.com.au for details. Include the name of the competition, your name, age, email address, contact number, and more importantly, your full address and postcode! All competitions close on the 25th of November. All competitions are open to residents of Australia and New Zealand.

GET MOBILE

Mobile phones have come a long way since the legendary bricks carried by Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen in *Wall Street*. Now mobile phones are tiny... and do things that, by all rights, something that small shouldn't be able to do.

Take the new Boost Mobile Platinum headset, for instance. With a 1.3 megapixel camera, an mp3 player, and 60MB of memory, this phone will match all your phone needs and more. And that's not to mention the mobile internet functions, and blue tooth as standard.

Now whether you know what all that techno language means or not, one thing is clear,

the Boost Mobile Platinum handset is one hell of a phone. And guess what, we have five of these handsets to giveaway.

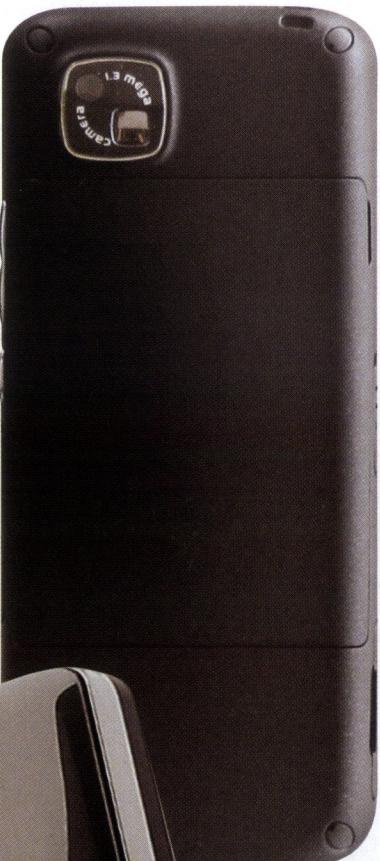
All you have to do is answer one simple question, and send it to us with the tagline 'Boost competition' following the instructions on page 22. Here comes the question:

Question

What resolution does the Boost Mobile Platinum camera have?

- A.** 1.0 megapixels
- B.** 1.1 megapixels
- C.** 1.3 megapixels

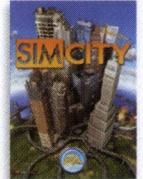
WIN!



BOOST MOBILE
"Where You At?"



Included on mobile:



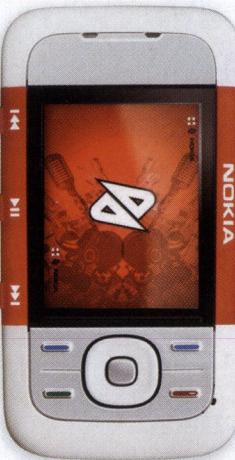
BOOST MOBILE GAME PHONE

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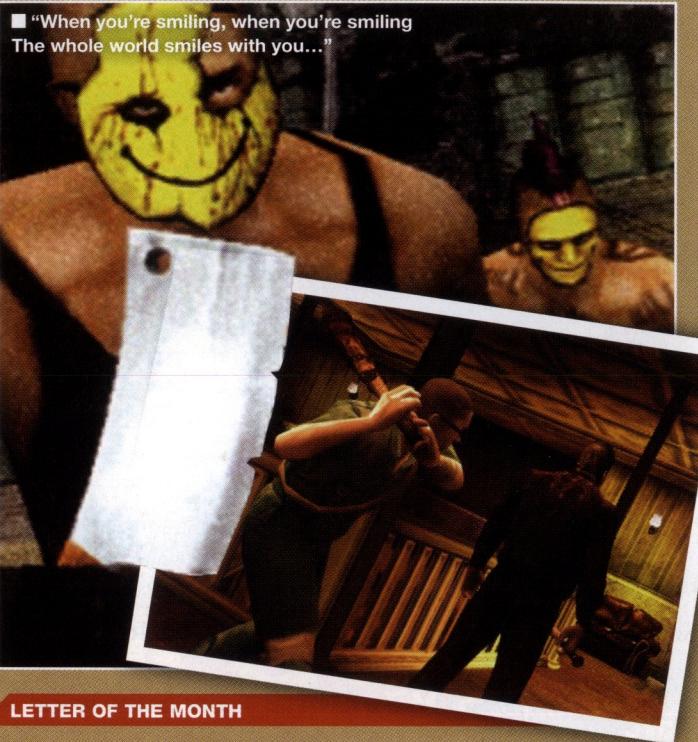
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LETTERS

Have your say and win **COD4!**



LETTER OF THE MONTH

RATED R

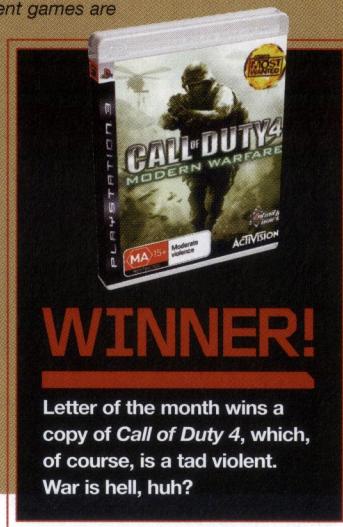
I firmly believe that the gaming world of Australia does NOT need that R18+ rating that you and other readers have been begging for. If a game was R-rated, it would probably only be because it was full of abundant, cruel, brutal and probably unnecessary violence and gore.

Videogames are supposed to be fun, right? Well, a game where you can act like a total psychopath, running through the entire story eviscerating everything in your path doesn't sound like a very sane source of fun. And if we did get an R rating, how would the shops sell a game where you could hack someone's head open with a pickaxe, splattering bits of blood and brain all over the wall? Think about the consequences before considering the R rating again, people.

Alexander Brown, Vic

It's interesting to hear a contrary opinion, but there are a number of things you haven't considered. For instance, you've touched on the main argument against an R18+ rating – a sudden influx of ultra-violent games. However, where would these come from? There isn't a secret stash of super violent games hovering off-shore waiting to enter the country the minute the classification system is updated. The truth is, exceptionally violent games are released in Australia all the time.

Resident Evil 4, The Punisher, Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, GTA: San Andreas, Driver: Parallel Lines and many more are all rated R18+ in New Zealand. In Australia they're rated MA15+. Can it be any clearer something is wrong here? We're not proposing the introduction of an adults only classification for a swag of nasty new games, we're arguing that it's necessary to treat mature titles like mature titles. The fact is the MA15+ rating just isn't doing the job and an R18+ rating will make it easier for everyone – retailers, parents, the OFLC and publishers. It's a clear indication of adult content. Thanks for bringing it up.



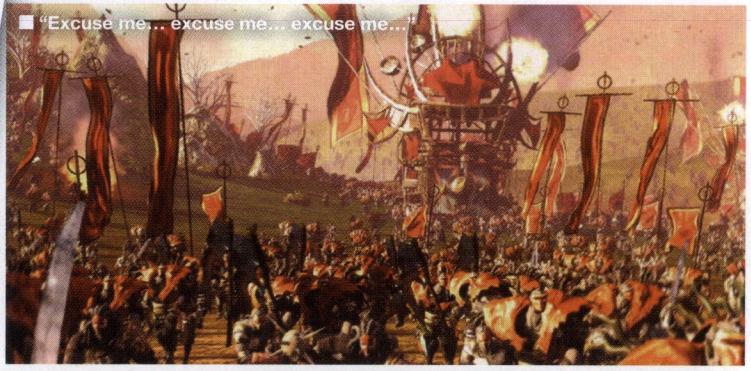
EXCLUSIVE!

Oh, omnipotent OPS staff. I'm tired of people saying that the PS3 has no good exclusives, but that's not what I want to talk about. Sony is one of those rare companies that isn't afraid to try new things. Other companies simply rely on franchises that have only been successful on past generations, but not Sony. The new exclusives on the PS3 may be the first iteration of brand new gaming series. Instead of relying solely on games that span a generation of consoles like *God of War*, developers are taking advantage of this chance to start anew. Like *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, Naughty Dog isn't going to create such a good idea, then only make one game. *Heavenly Sword* looks set to become a strong franchise (depending on whether Nariko dies or the sword is destroyed), *Resistance 2* is a strong possibility and *Evolution* could possibly turn *MotorStorm* into a franchise. So I'm just telling you to wait and see the games that start to multiply.

Paul Menezes, via email



Sony has definitely put a huge focus on creating new franchises for the PS3, and for the most part has been hugely successful in doing so, especially with *Heavenly Sword*, *Resistance*, and *MotorStorm*. It's a risky strategy, sequels usually reap a higher financial reward, but Sony is clearly building for the future: the creation of more successful exclusive franchises will clearly work out for Sony in the long term.



MASSIVE DAMAGE!

Hey guys! I want to tell you some important points about PlayStation. First of all girls can be great, but why do they hate games so much? I mean they spend hours in front of the mirror going through torture to make their hair a bit better than what it was five minutes ago when they could be playing *Oblivion* and just be having fun. Second of all, turn-based

games, some can be good but what's with the idea? I mean would this work in real life? "I entered the battle so I get the first shot." "OK!" "Haha, 32 points of damage." "My turn, stand still... yes! 14 points of damage." I mean who would wait for you to hit them? Answer: no one.

Sergy, Victoria



Alright Sergy, first off, there are plenty of girls who love games: we receive craploads of letters and emails from girls, some of which have been published on these hallowed pages. We do agree however that there is a certain sub section of the female species who would prefer watching *So You Think You Can Dance* over games. That is not cool. As for the turn-based comments, we reckon that about half of the office are nodding our heads sagely in agreement while the other half want to tear off your testicles. It's a dividing issue, but not everything in games has to be totally realistic in gaming.

CUTTINGS

Delicious bite-sized letter morsels that are easy to swallow and won't ruin your dinner. They're like Milky Ways you can read...

BLING BLING

Does Sony have any plans to release PS3 games on "Platinum", just like PSOne, PS2 and PSP?

Andrew Gee, WA

Sony has released no plans as of yet, but we think this only a matter of time. *Resistance: Fall of Man* and *MotorStorm* will possibly be the first we would think.

PS3... CHEAP?

Thanks to games' exclusivity on the PS3 and 360 I have had to buy both systems and have great games on them. But I've got to say I am so much more impressed with the cheaper PS3! I have read other mags complaining how over priced the PS3 but so far my Xbox 360 has cost me more and I have had dramas with breakdowns. For \$579.95 you get the box with a tiny hard drive and no HDMI. The PS3, however, comes with two controllers (that don't need AA batteries) and two games for around \$960. For the Xbox that's another \$80 and \$20 each for battery packs and \$35 for the charger cable. Then you fork out another \$250 for a HD DVD add-on to compete with Blu-ray and a further \$170 for the wireless transmitter (while the PS3 is wireless on the box). That's around \$1135. The PS3 is cheaper, it comes with everything straight up. It might be cheaper in the US but I think it's still worth the price tag.

Fabian, via email



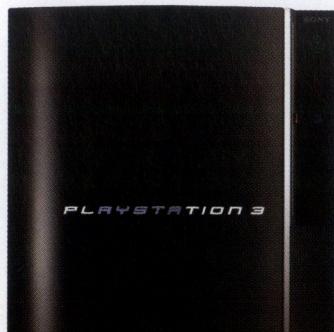
PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Dear OPS, I am writing in reply to your section in OPS #8 page 21 about parents and videogames. First off, I am a parent and yes, I love videogames. I think that videogames teach you a bit of everything from planning ahead for your next move to saving money for the next release of a mad game. Parents should realise that when you're playing games, you're at home – not out taking drugs or drinking in the local park. There is also a lot of quality time to be spent playing multiplayer games with your children. One last note to the younger readers: yes, I read and love the OPS mag!

Anthony Potter

Thanks for the letter Anthony, good to hear from you. It certainly seems that slowly attitudes are beginning to change. People who picked up gaming as kids are having kids of their own and more and more people are getting onboard.

Fabian, thanks for breaking it down like that. When we try to explain why the PS3 is value for money, we just stutter a lot, headbutt walls and then scream, "Just buy it you stupid dummies!", which, as you can imagine, doesn't really have the desired effect. We're still not entirely stoked about the sweet deal the Yanks are getting over there in Yankland, but we appreciate your help in explaining the specifics to the masses. Thanks.



The average age of Australian gamers is now 28, although IEAA research indicates by 2014 the average age of gamers will be the same as non-gamers: 42! Hopefully the more extreme idiots out there will start to, if not understand gaming, at least respect it as a legitimate, healthy hobby.

SPEAK TO US

Love the new mag? Hate the new mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

OPS Feedback

Derwent Howard PO Box 1037
Bondi Junction, NSW 1355
ops@derwenthoward.com.au

ONE GAME AT A TIME!

Will there be another GTA game after GTAIV. Do you know if there is one coming?

Chris, Vic

Whoa there boss! We've checked our crystal balls and it's inevitable that Rockstar will release another GTA game after GTAIV. However, how about we cool our jets until GTAIV actually comes out?

FILTH!

So... um... er... when can we expect to see Blu-ray porn? Sorry, but someone had to ask...

Alan, NZ

Come on Alan, our wives read this magazine (or so they tell us). Still, a little birdie has informed us blue movies on Blu-ray do exist and are available on the web. Porn on the internet?! Perish the thought!

IT'S TIME TO TAKE BACK THE STREETS!

SWAT

TARGET LIBERTY



"SWAT has an air of authenticity. You can almost smell the cordite."

Official PlayStation Magazine

WWW.SWATPSP.COM



PlayStation Portable

SIERRA

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Moderate violence,
Moderate coarse
language

Where Daddy shows you how...

PS3 HOW TO...

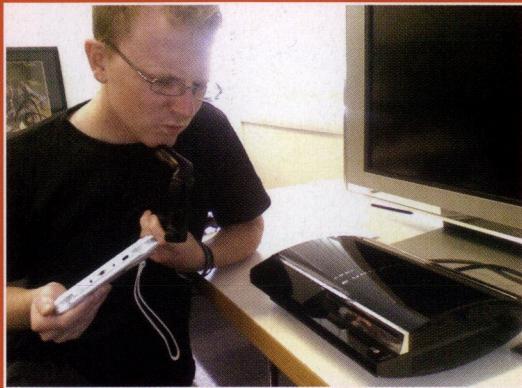
Remote play

PSP and PS3 up a tree K-I-S-S-I-N-G!

We know how it is. You read about all the cool stuff your spanking new PS3 can do; it can upload your photographs, play video clips, the thing can even make you a ham sandwich if you ask nicely (disclaimer: the PS3 cannot make you a sandwich... yet) but sometimes working out how to do all these cool things can be a bit tricky...

Well, never fear technophobes, OPS is here, flying to the rescue with our all new 'How to' section, becoming a beacon of light, in a sea of USB cables, wireless modems and all the other idiotic technical bullcrap you have to wade through these days.

First up... remote play with your PSP and PS3... hold tight old chaps!



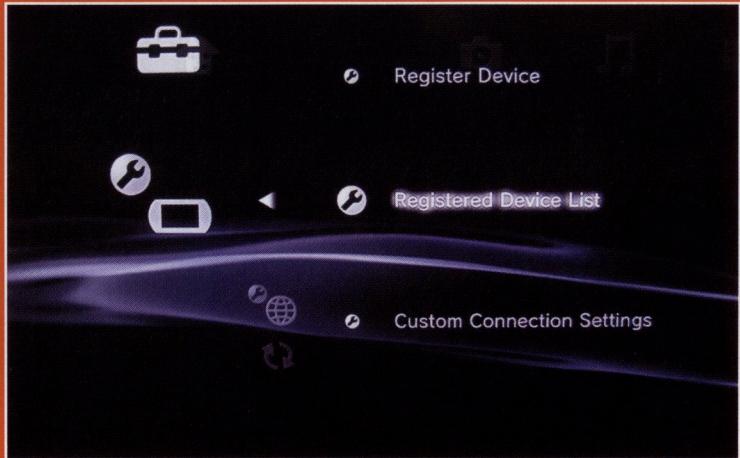
STEP 1

What ho, old chaps, Mark here! What's all this PS3 and PSP business? They can be played in tandem, you say? Why, that's preposterous, you little scamp. I don't believe a word of it! I'll give you ten of the best from my belt buckle for your insolence... I'll spank you good!



STEP 2

Okay dokey (deep breath), I'll give it a bash. What is this infernal device? This is the on switch isn't it? Ah, that's much better. Electricity – what an invention, eh? You can do anything with that stuff nowadays...



STEP 3

So let's get this right... first you use this controller thing, and scroll to the register device tab, click on this and follow the instructions. Remember you need your USB cable to hook up the PSP and PS3...



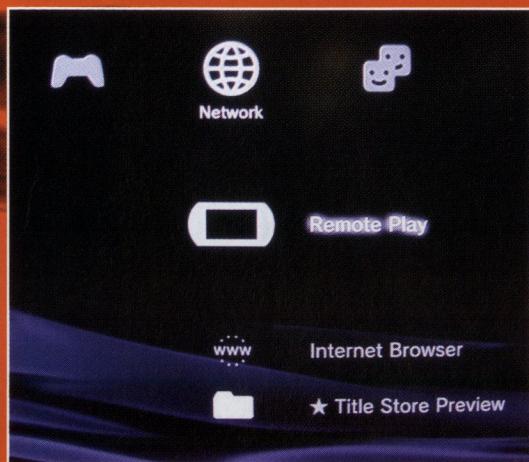
STEP 4

But remember to select the USB connection on the menu section of the PSP first, on the network tab, or else you'll fail you young whippersnappers. Now it's time to register the PSP and PS3 together as one dynamic unit!



STEP 5

Oh lordy, things are going well aren't they children! Maybe I won't have to wield my belt buckle after all. Oh! This really is going to be terribly fantastic fun! (P.S. why do I look like an Albino pigeon in this picture... can't we photoshop this or something?)



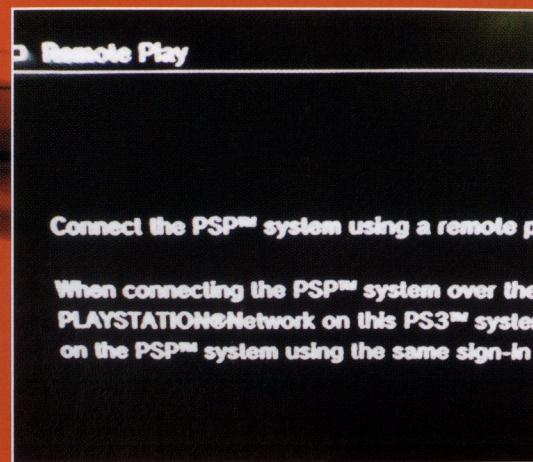
STEP 6

Now that you're registered, you spunky young philly, you can now navigate your PS3 menu towards the remote play thingymibob – you can find it under the network tab in the main menu. Hurry up old spice!



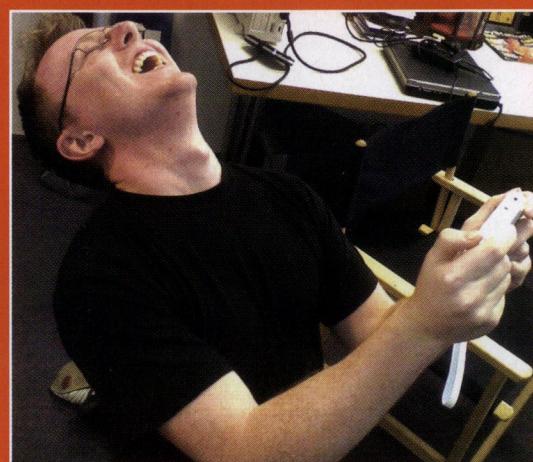
STEP 8

Oh we're almost there! Go to the network tab, select Remote play and choose to connect via Private Network, and lastly select the PlayStation 3 when asked to select your connection and the...



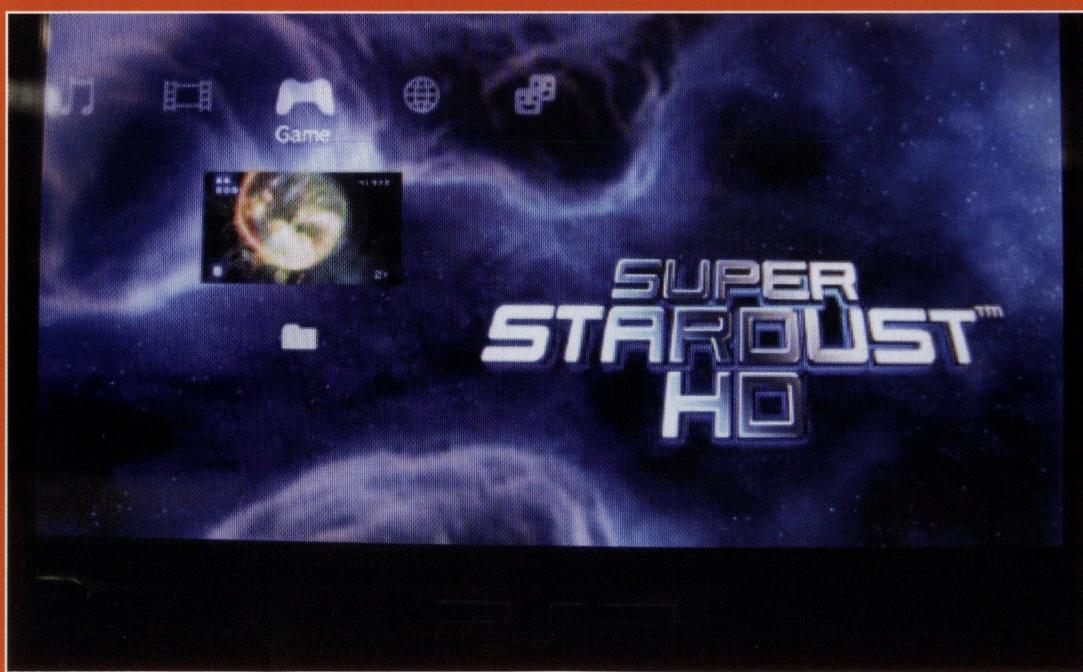
STEP 7

Come on everyone! Can you feel the excitement? We're almost there! When this screen comes up on your PS3, you're ready to go. Now it's time to pick up your PSP and work the magic...



STEP 9

... victory is ours! Oh my word we've done it! We've coerced the PSP and the PS3 into a symbiotic union of gaming majesty! Well, maybe not gaming, since you can't play PS3 games on it...



STEP 10

... but you can now easily access all the pics, video, and music on your PSP from your trusty ol' PSP. Look we even took a crappy little pic of the whole beautiful thing in action, just to prove it! Yeah, you thought we couldn't pull it off didn't you? Chew on that! We're number one! We're number one!

WHAT NOT TO DO...

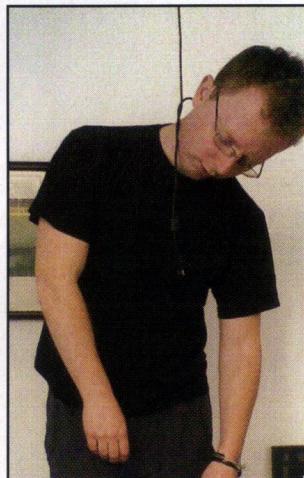
THROW PSP AT 1080P LCD...

Oh well, we don't know – maybe you ran out of battery, maybe you pushed the wrong button, maybe you bought *Barbie's Horse Adventure* by mistake, but it doesn't matter how mad you get while trying to set up remote play... do NOT throw the PSP at the TV!



HANG YOURSELF WITH USB CABLE...

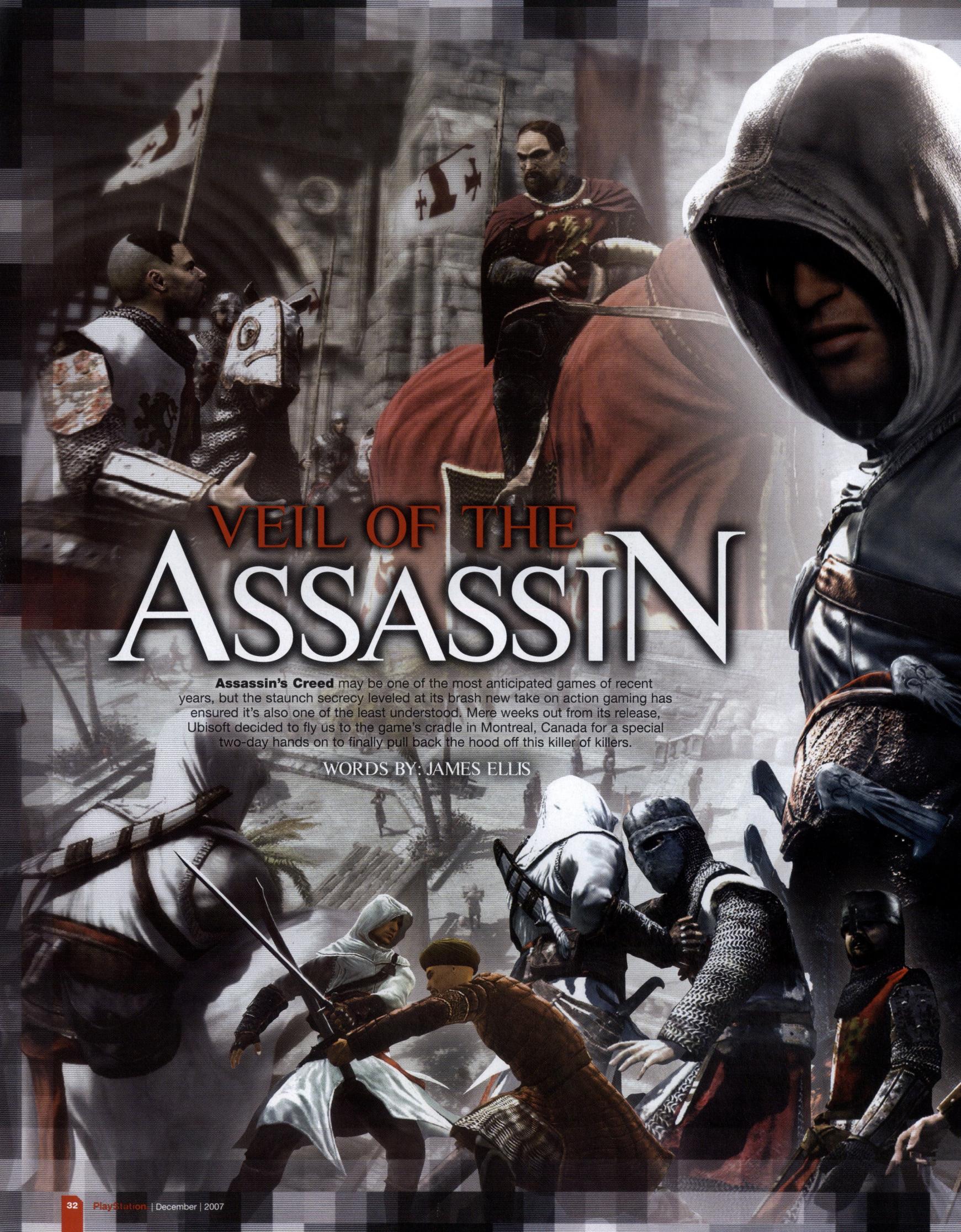
Whoa... stop! You've got so much to live for! *Assassin's Creed*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Final Fantasy XIII*! These games are all coming out soon! Don't do it! It's not worth it... remote play isn't that great!



LAUNCH PS3 OUT OF NEAREST WINDOW...

First off, the PS3 is frickin' heavy... this isn't a GameCube we're talking about here. Second of all, dropped from a window it's more lethal than a Chuck Norris roundhouse kick. And finally... it's your super powered, ultimate multimedia games machine you idiot!





VEIL OF THE ASSASSIN

Assassin's Creed may be one of the most anticipated games of recent years, but the staunch secrecy leveled at its brash new take on action gaming has ensured it's also one of the least understood. Mere weeks out from its release, Ubisoft decided to fly us to the game's cradle in Montreal, Canada for a special two-day hands on to finally pull back the hood off this killer of killers.

WORDS BY: JAMES ELLIS



Montreal, Canada: we're slinking our way through the halls of Ubisoft's labyrinth gaming center, camera in hand, notepad and pen ready, while each passing doorway yields a flock of telescoping necks and darting eyes. There's little sound. In a facility with several floors all dedicated to creating some of the edgiest forms of thumb-tickling entertainment scheduled for the next year or so, the mood is surprisingly stoic – stoic and tense. Our P.R. guide, breathing the tight air too, tells us "Assassin's is on deadline".

After four years of production, a team of over 200 minds, and a zeppelin of a budget no one is willing to talk about, Assassin's

Creed is big. After some verbal jostling our guide comes half way on the issue of production costs and gives us Ubisoft's nominal sales target: 1,000,000 units. Bold, even for a title that has scaled the peaks of industry interest and snagged a hood's worth of pre-release awards, but the project has never been anything but. Back in 2004 with nothing but a rough outline for main character Altair (pronounced Al-ty-air, not Al-tear), the head of the company issued their much-touted mandate to Creative Director Patrice Desilets and his team to "redefine the action-adventure genre for the next gen". Not exactly on the same level as "please bring up a couple of croissants to the meeting room", now is it?

Keeping the nerves further on edge, *Assassin's Creed* is an original IP, a genre bender with no set convention to bank on. While that forms much of the game's enigmatic appeal, gamers and the press have had no idea how it would play, how it would work. Will it be *Hitman* set in the Holy Land? Perhaps the mature *Zelda* game players have been pining for on non-Nintendo hardware? Certainly we had no idea – until now.

KILLER IN THE HOUSE

Back in Montreal we find ourselves escorted into one of the studio's testing rooms to have our curiosity on this starry child finally quenched as we're set to play "more content than anyone outside Ubisoft". And play we do. We lap it up – apparently cutting a swathe through around 25 per cent of the game's content as we sit in the testing room for several sessions across two days. After dispatching many a crony, scaling many a roof,

and hustling through some of the most authentic replications of a land and life far from our own, all our questions about *Assassin's Creed* – how it plays, what it's like, and just how damn good it is – are answered.

So let's get down to the nitty gritty, the beef in the shepherd's pie; how does the game work? First, it's crucial to understand that the game world is made up of three massive recreations of the ancient cities of Jerusalem, Damascus and Acre, as well as Altair's quaint home town Masyaf, and finally a sprawling green collection of valleys, mountains, guard posts and pathways known as The Kingdom that connects them together. To kick off each assassination you must venture back to your lair in Masyaf and have a chinwag with Assassin CEO, Sinan – a bearded bloke in a hood that looks like he snacks on babies. He'll give you a list of one or more targets to dispatch as well as any upgrades you've scored for previous jobs well done. After you've picked which bloke you're out to skewer first, the gameplay can be broken down into four parts: traveling to and into the target's city, investigating your target, carrying out the assassination, and escaping alive.

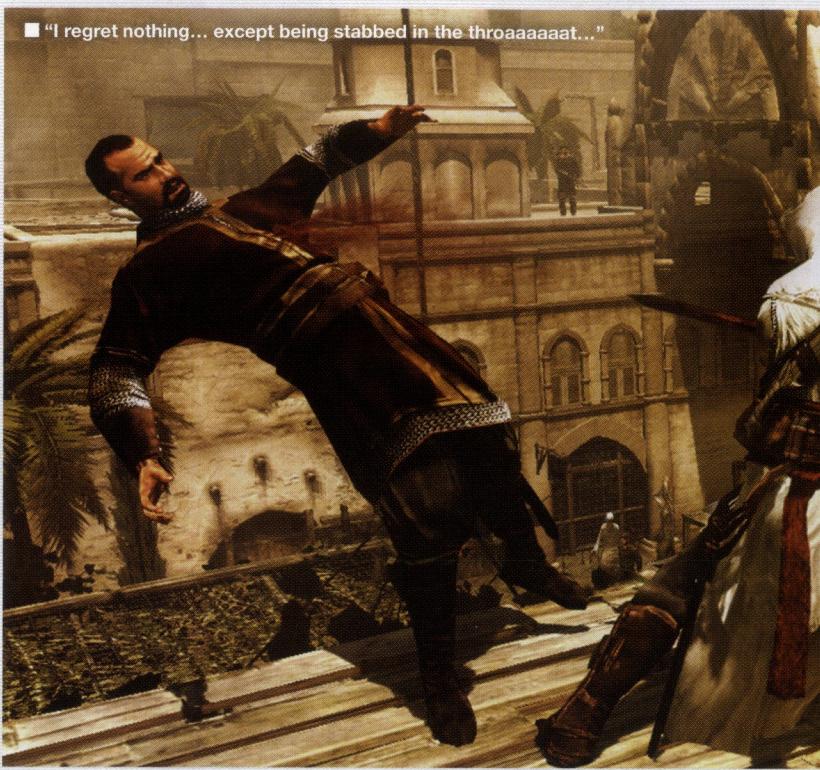
Before you take to altering the course of human history, Masyaf makes for a great place to come to grips with *Assassin's Creed*'s unique control setup. Basically your shady assassin has low and high profiles, the former for standard movement through the game world, and the latter – accessed by holding down a shoulder button – for breaking into

sprints and pulling off all that nutty wall climbing gibberish. Thankfully said wall climbing is dead easy to get the hang of and doesn't require any tricky multi combo button presses. All you have to do is hold down a couple of buttons and direct Altair where you want him to go and he'll climb/scale/leap/hop/shimmy/pounce his way there. Or die trying.

I'M SORRY, IS THAT A DAGGER IN YOUR THROAT?

Once outside Masyaf you can leap upon a steed and access a map to help you get around like Colin Farrell at a sweet sixteen party. While the map starts off blotted with the fog of war, you can clear it up by ascending Altair to the top of various towers littered about the land. This will require you to either play sneaky buggers with the enemy guards posted around the tower to ensure you remain unseen, or else whip out your sword and turn them all into vulture chum. Once the map is clear, finding your way to each city is a breeze. As an added bonus, once you've found your way to each place, you'll be able to bypass The Kingdom and zip straight there at various points on the map. Thank you very much, Ubisoft.

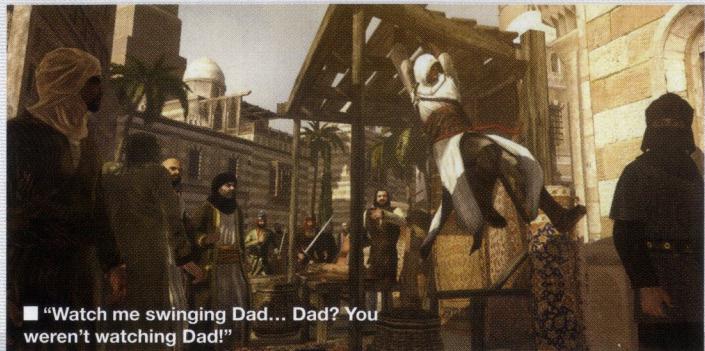
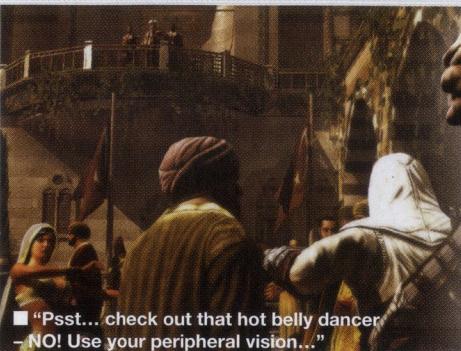
"IT'S THIS INTENSITY, THIS PANIC, THAT IS THE LIFELOOD OF ASSASSIN'S CREED"



city being bitch slapped around by a bunch of loutish louts. By bailing out the old geezer and cutting up his attackers you'll trigger a procession of monks that you can walk amongst as they lurch into the city (it's similar to the slick CGI cinematic *Assassin's Creed* showed off back at E3 eons ago). Part one of your mission complete.

ALTAIR P.I.

Now it's time to gather some info and suss out the whereabouts of your target. Basically your map will show you the location of several high vantage points that you'll need to climb to defog the map and spot leads for your investigation. However, between you and the pinnacle of each tower are streams of busy street folk pimping more crud than a Bondi market, as well as a host of armed guards. At the start of the game





these bullies are largely relaxed, but as you continue on your assassination spree they'll progress through three stages of alertness, moving from 'Unaware' where they're hooching about chatting up ladies and kicking kids, to 'Suspicious', and finally 'Informed' where they're marching about on the lookout for someone matching your description.

When the guards are in this highly strung latter stage it pays to know your surroundings. Scurrying up onto a roof in broad daylight will have the guards on to you in a flash, as will knocking over a merchant carrying a pot, or getting into a fight with the local village junkie that shoves anyone within reach around. Even when you make it to the rooftops

you're not out of harm's way, as getting spotted by an archer immediately sets off trouble. Which is bad. Again, playing sneaky buggers by using the rooftops as cover will eventually see you through unscathed and get you up to your destination where you're called to 'synchronise' (don't ask, we're not allowed to tell) your surroundings. Here the camera does a ballroom spin on the spot, showing off the insane detail of the city below while key targets in your investigation light up on the map.

To be honest, the process of combing through these contacts was a bit out of whack with our expectations of the game. While we'd anticipated hunting down the information for each assassination would be the meat of the meal. It's more like the complimentary table bread that feels like it's there out of obligation. Basically after moving to a contact marker on the map, you'll either have to eavesdrop on a conversation, pick a pocket, sprint around collecting flags using your free running skills, or beat the crap out of a chap for info. Each time you successfully achieve your

contact objective you'll be granted a bit of trivial information about the upcoming hit including where your target will be lurking and what he'll be doing there. While each assassination features as many as six contacts you can investigate, you only have to knock over two or three before the city's Assassin Bureau can be visited and you can go for the big kill.

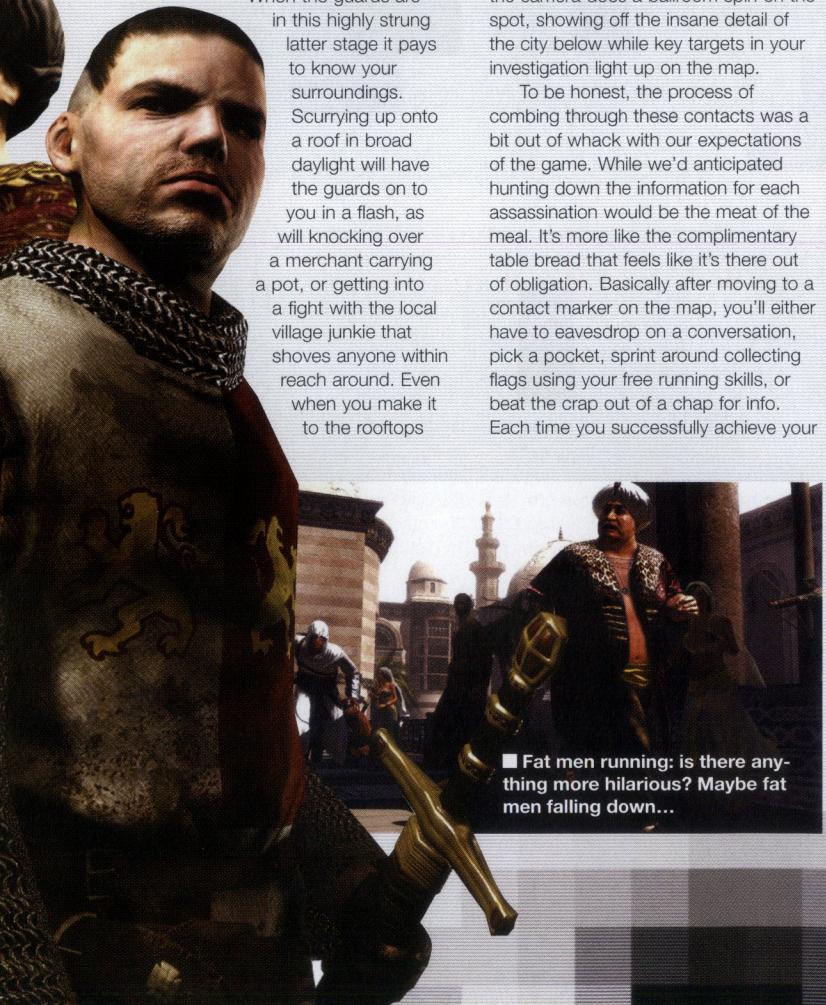
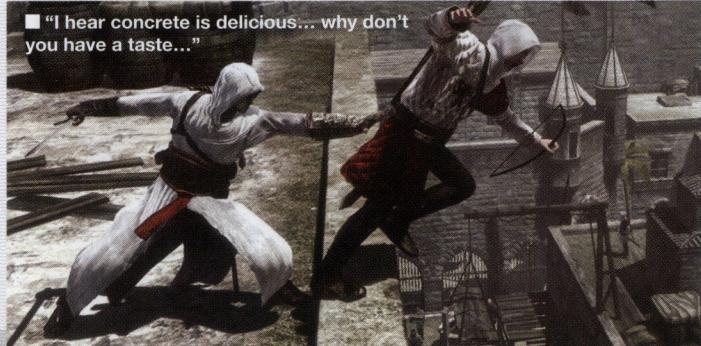
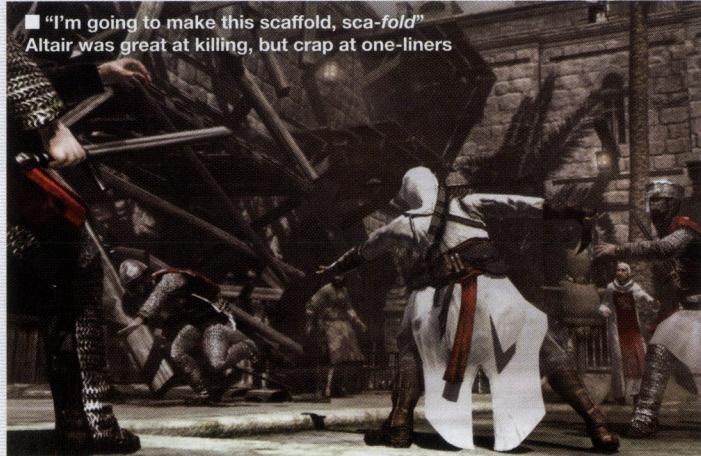
FROM THE GRASSY KNOLL

And so we come to the main event. Moving into the designated area where your target is located kicks off a dramatic set piece. Creeping into crusader controlled Acre in this case we found monster tosspot and assassination target William de Montferrat executing some people in front of his cronies. We couldn't quite hear how he was justifying it because we were to busy climbing around the inside walls of the fortress TO KICK HIS ARSE. After eliminating some pesky archers with Altair's throwing knives we didn't have much of a problem landing behind big Willie and giving him a quick poke in the throat with our extra-nasty assassination blade – the weapon that must be used when killing your targets. "Take that, punk."

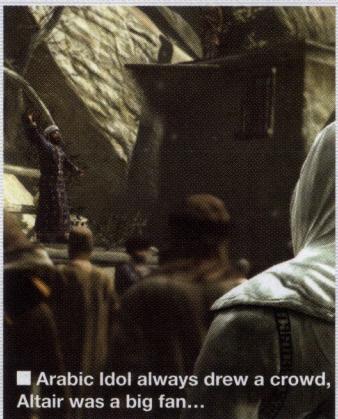
As expected, the hard part comes next. Forget Alcatraz, forget your momma's locked broom cupboard, getting to safety after bleeding one of these geezers in front of their entourage is a premiere Houdini challenge. If you can run for bugger, you should. Apart from the ten or so blokes that'll be

throwing their long swords at your head before you've even had time to give yourself a pat on the back, you'll also have to contend with every grunt in the city either pelting in towards the scene of the crime or drawing their swords and eagerly waiting for you to pop into their view. It's this intensity, this panic, that is the lifeblood of *Assassin's Creed* and the ultimate reminder that above all this is an action game. If you manage to scramble up a wall away from the procession of blades moving around to flank you, you'll be hit by a flurry of rocks pelted by the soldiers below. Take too long to climb and you'll fall on your arse and have to duke it out with dozens of men. Act fast enough and you might just pull yourself up and try to get away. It turns out though that these soldiers aren't as sissy as they seem, and many will ably hunt down ladders and scaffolding and bolt right up onto the rooftops to confront you. If you're lucky enough you'll be able to create some space between yourself and your attackers, hopefully getting out of their line of sight (which is indicated on-screen by an eye icon). At this point, quickly jumping into one of many curtained rooftop hubs littered across the city will find you safety for now – but if you can't shake their gaze the only way to avoid more combat is by looking for a Leap of Faith.

These are brilliant. Apart from being located atop every lookout tower in the game, they're strewn around the city in crafty places, illustrated not with a gaudy fluorescent green arrow that rips you out of the game world, but contextually by ledge loitering pigeons and a pool of



■ Fat men running: is there anything more hilarious? Maybe fat men falling down...



■ Arabic Idol always drew a crowd, Altair was a big fan...

accompanying white crap. Leaping off these will see Altair launch into a swan dive and land in a cart of hay, scoring Olympic gold on the way and losing his pursuers. Brilliant.

EN GUARD, BIATCH!

All this running and diving might make you think that actually getting the sword out should only be a last resort, but it's not. In fact during our time with the game we regularly and intentionally kicked off sprees of violence against opposing guards because it's just damn fun. While *Assassin's Creed* is not a flat out combat game like *God of War* or *Heavenly Sword*, its swordplay has its own distinct style of addictiveness. While Altair can defend like a brick wall and parry just about every strike that comes his way, he can also perform clanging combos and fatal counterattacks that see the camera throw on its Hollywood shoes and dance about each gory deathblow. The latter counters are obviously the most spectacular way to eviscerate an enemy, and while they're straightforward with Altair's standard long sword, they get tougher to perform when he switches to his dagger and assassination blade. The sunny side is that the shorter weapons have a slew of badass counter executions that'll make you want to shave your head and get a tattoo on your face. At one

point we pulled off a successful counter with our assassination blade and saw Altair duck over an incoming sword and deliver a machinegun exchange of stabbing punches to his attackers' torso, puncturing him like spiked pistons. What further adds to the madness of these encounters is that they often go down on high rooftops after Altair gets cornered doing the bloody runner. It's like a western showdown. And western showdowns are always good.

CITY OF GOD

Yet for all the high-wire melees, all the choreographed kills and flawless assassinations, the moment that brought *Assassin's Creed* home as the slice of gaming history that it's shaping up to be was remarkably restrained. Hunched over on our steed and drawingl out from the mountainous green pathlands of The Kingdom under a low sun we emerged onto an overhang that surveyed the entire walled city of Jerusalem – blinding, golden, exhaustively detailed, complete. A fresco of achievement in art design, visual wizardry and theatrics, it was a time-machine of a moment as we suddenly 'got' the Crusades and 'got' the significance of Jerusalem – not just back in the day, but in modern times as well. No other game we've played has accomplished such a feat, and we lingered there longer than required. 



■ "Oh crap... I'm dead"



■ "I am a fat man
- I'm cool with that..."



NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED

An interview with **MAXIME BELAND - GAME DESIGN DIRECTOR** on **ASSASSIN'S CREED**

While in Montreal we were lucky enough to quiz *Assassin's Creed* Game Design Director Maxime Béland, previously of *Rainbow Six Vegas* fame, with some quizzical questions regarding the game's development.

OPS: The game features an open-world style of play within each of its five main areas, but while vogue, critics of the style have suggested it robs the game design of any dynamic as the player progresses. Do you agree that's a problem with open-world games in the 'sandbox' genre?

MAXIME: I think it depends on how you approach it. We did a good job of setting up different areas. Yes, it's a sandbox game and you can go anywhere you want, but when you go to kill a target there's a specific setup we make happen when you arrive because we want you to have a cool experience at that moment.

OPS: What critical gameplay issue did you guys struggle with when designing the game's combat?

MAXIME: We wanted the fights to be realistic. I think when you look

at games like *Heavenly Sword* it's all fantasy. We didn't want to go there. The swords are super realistic – there's no jumping in the air and doing five flips. So that was a clear direction we got from Patrice, and of course it made our lives a lot harder, but I think it gives us a fight system that's a lot less about just pressing buttons. You have to look at what's happening.

OPS: The game has been in production for around four years but are there still things you ran out of time to put in? Are there aspects of the game you wish could improve?

MAXIME: (Laughs) A lot, a lot. The game has transformed, it has evolved from the beginning. Sometimes the team wanted to go a little more RPG, so there was a currency system the guys were talking about where you could buy stuff, sell stuff – but at one point we needed to focus. And I think a good game focuses on a couple of elements and does them really well. So it's cool because what I find great with *Assassin's Creed* is that the world is very big and gives you a lot of ideas, but at one point you have to say we don't want to have to work on the game for 100 years.

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PREVIEWS

PS3 PS2 PSP

■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ PLAYERS: 1-4
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ
■ DEVELOPER: YUKES
■ WEB: www.thq-games.com.au

■ "Yeah, that's it – now throw me into that group of hot chicks over there!"



WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2008

"This match is scheduled for one fall ..."

W ho'd have thunk it? With THQ's annual roid-a-thon soon slapping down on PS3 we're actually in the position to talk about the WWE's kicks, slaps, blood, and ringside tits using words like "realistic". So there. You've been warned. Accept the hard irony now and we'll all get through this preview without any trouble, see?

It's been seven years since publisher THQ and developer Yuke's released *WWF*

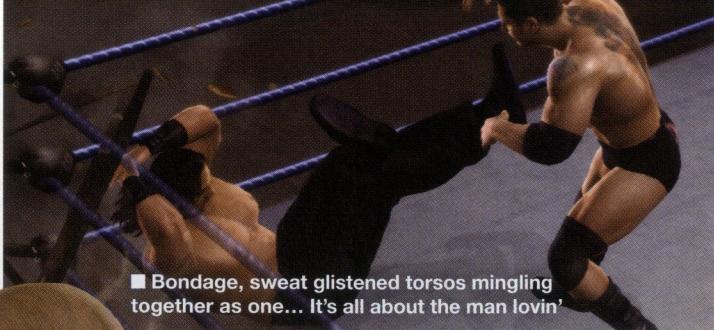
Smackdown on the original PlayStation (yes, back before they went to court against that panda mob), but thankfully they're aware that anyone who gives a crap about musky men in spandex has already laid out the cash for one of their games before. They know *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2008* must really whip the llama's ass this time around. It can't just be a tad better, sharper, meatier than last year's PS2 effort – it has to

superslam it into the commentary table. Take to it with a chair. Obliterate it with a turnbuckle loop-the-loop. Choke the life from it with a cross-face throat cutter.

To that end, *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2008* has been primed with more steroid-like goodness than a corner store charcoal chicken. A cosmetic make over to bring the series into the so-hot-right-now new generation of visuals, broad online options and a host of game play

additions have all been injected into its granite glutes to get past fans once again interested in slapping down the dough.

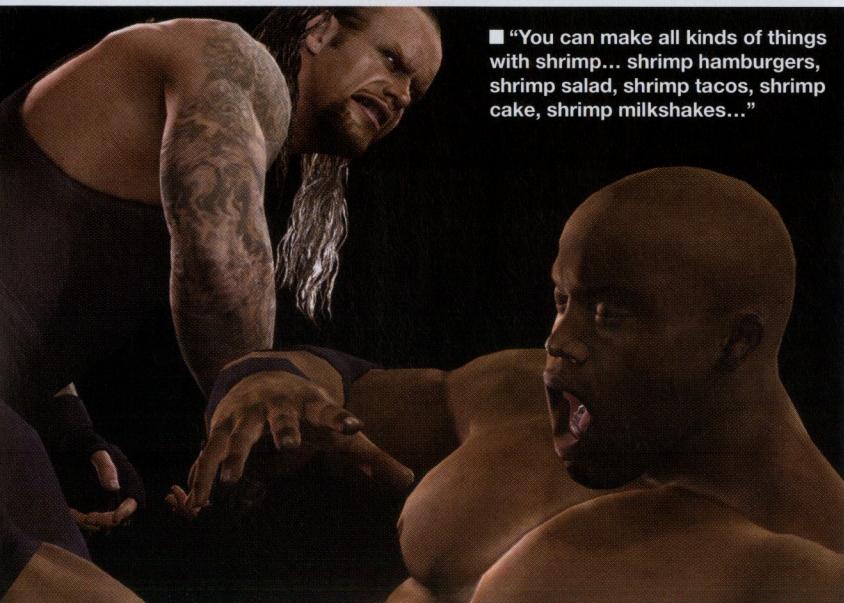
Here at OPS Towers we were recently lucky enough to sample the upcoming wedgie fest and jot down an early impression of how the game is shaping up, along with a list of the new improvements the game is pimping. First and foremost we got to get in and experiment with each of the eight new



■ Bondage, sweat glistened torsos mingling together as one... It's all about the man lovin'



■ "You can make all kinds of things with shrimp... shrimp hamburgers, shrimp salad, shrimp tacos, shrimp cake, shrimp milkshakes..."



Superstar Fighting Styles (SFS) seen in the game. Unlike previous games where you had no option for tweaking your wrestler to fight a certain way, you now have a choice between two SFSs per wrestler from the eight on offer. Before you ask, we're guessing they've been limited to two per character to avoid some bizarre against-the-grain cocktails that might have otherwise allowed blimps like Mark Henry to dart about like Rey Mysterio – which just wouldn't be realistic (there's that word). Nope, large puffers like Henry, Batista, Umaga and Bobby Lashley are granted SFSs like Brawler, Hardcore, and Powerhouse, the latter granting them the ability to go into Rampage mode and cop punches to the neck without flinching before returning them tenfold (kind of like Hulk Hogan did back in the days when you wanted him to be your dad). Legend killer Randy Orton and other similar knobjockeys, on the other hand, have access to the Dirty SFS, allowing them to use the ref as a shield, poke their opponents in the eyes, and dog-hit them in the testisatchel. Meanwhile if you only play wrestling games to make yourself feel powerful, selecting Shawn Michaels or flavour of the month John Cena will allow to you be a Showman and taunt the other boofhead in the ring before stealing their finishing move.

While the SFSs may seem a little gimmicky on paper they grew on us when we started mucking around with the absolutely, positively, humongous selection of game types you can battle across. At one point we took John Cena in against Undertaker in a Buried Alive match where you've got to slam your opponent into a nearby coffin before dropping a mountain of dirt on them. We were getting schooled by Mr. Goths Are Cool for most of the match until Cena got in a few good hits and was able to activate the Fists of Fury ability from his Brawler Style that delivered an unstoppable flurry of aggression onto the face of the 'taker 'til he was belted into the coffin and the match was won. We stood on our chairs and cheered. Then realised that was a bit silly and stopped.

New styles aside, the second other big feature that has been commended by mistreated and abused SIXAXIS controllers everywhere is the Struggle Submission System. While you'll still be mashing the buttons to bits when you get planted on the canvas or are under a pin, now when either dishing out a figure-4 leg lock or being on the receiving end of an armbar by fast food customer of the year Sabu, you'll be totally focused on

twiddling the right analogue stick to either apply more pain or escape. While it's not apparent where you have to twiddle said stick and in what way, we used it to great length when we jumped into a recreation of the infamous Wrestlemania XII iron man match between Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart from the game's new Hall of Fame mode that features setups of famous matches. Yes, fans, the Struggle Submission System came into play with Sharpshooter after Sharpshooter applied back and forth, back and forth...

While it's clear the spicy new modes and additions are raring to burn up PS3s everywhere, the same can't yet be said for the game's visuals – at least not at this stage. We don't want to comment too much on them because the game is far from finished and a lot of polishing gets done in the last few weeks leading up to release, but it's apparent *Smackdown Vs Raw 2008* likely won't be at the top of the good-looks leaderboard when it shortly hits shelves. While the animations for the characters were much improved, the character models looked dog chewed and the crowd blander than an army of lunching accountants. Keep your fingers crossed that they'll quickly throw another layer of paint on to ensure *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2008* can hold the championship belt for the entire year.

■ James Ellis

HALL OF FAME



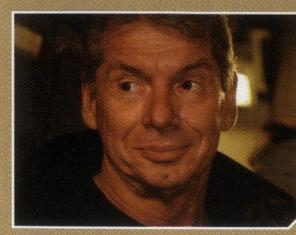
Hunger back to a time when wrestlers were so cheesy they were cool? The stars have aligned and a host of awesome retro superstars are set to feature in *SvR 08*, from more recent sensations like The Rock, Steven Austin, and Mick Foley, to true retro warriors like Bret Hart, "Ravishing" Rick Rude and even "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. What also rates high on our Rad-O-Meter is that you can also fight Vince McMahon and his nose-picking belly boy Shane. Technically that means you'll be able to recreate Survivor Series history and use Bret Hart to punch the WWE boss in the face in one of the dressing rooms. Which is cool.

WHAT THEY SAY:

■ "With the tremendous capabilities of the PlayStation 3 system, gamers can now truly live the life of a WWE Superstar and choose from numerous ways to play."

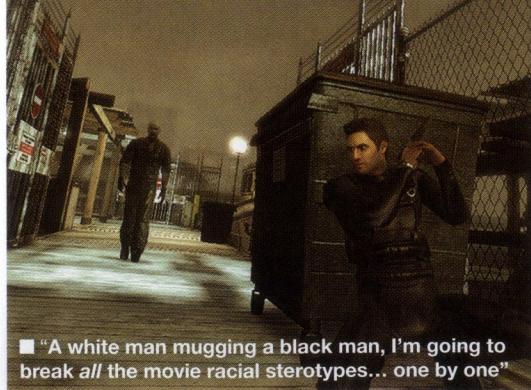
WHAT WE SAY:

■ The flash new features and multiplayer will prove a boon for fans. Hopefully the finished version will look a bit better, though.



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

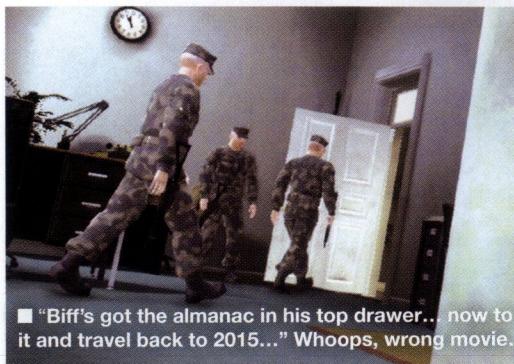
■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: MID 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: VIVENDI
■ DEVELOPER: HIGH MOON STUDIOS
■ WEB: www.bournethegame.com



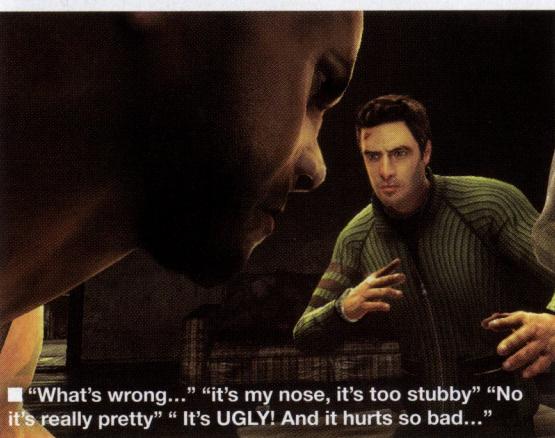
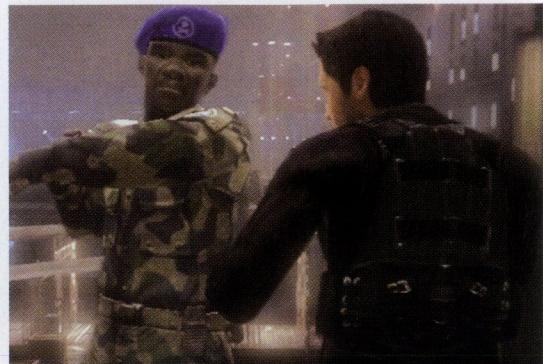
■ "A white man mugging a black man, I'm going to break *all* the movie racial stereotypes... one by one"



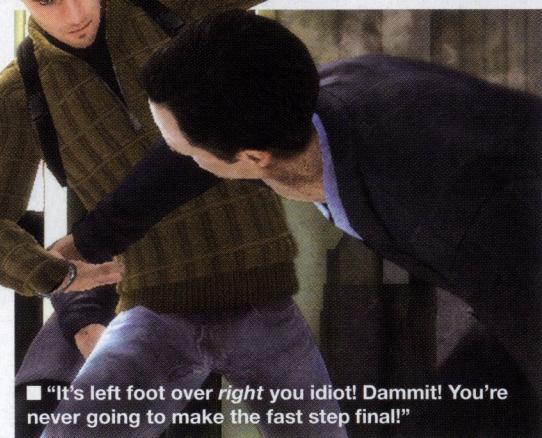
■ Bourne's gun: fires actual nuclear missiles



■ "Biff's got the almanac in his top drawer... now to steal it and travel back to 2015..." Whoops, wrong movie...



■ "What's wrong..." "it's my nose, it's too stubby" "No it's really pretty" "It's UGLY! And it hurts so bad..."



■ "Um, there's something on your sleeve" "Huh?" "Haha! You're so easy Samuel L. Jackson!"

WHAT THEY SAY:

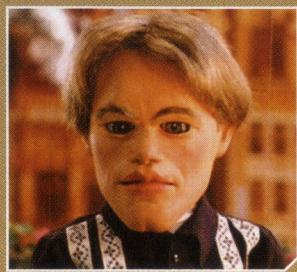
■ "...delves deep into Jason Bourne's character with gameplay and game presentation inspired by the aggressive filmmaking and frenetic action found in the films."

WHAT WE SAY:

■ Bourne rocks. Let's hope the game does him justice.

MAAATT DAMOONN!

Matt Damon, the actor who brought Bourne to big screen, is actually the most bankable actor in Hollywood – largely thanks to heavy-hitters like *Ocean's Eleven* and its two sequels, *The Departed* and the Bourne trilogy. For his last three films, Damon has reaped in \$29 at the box-office for every dollar he earned making them. According to a recent interview on *Rove*, someone says, "Maaatt Damoonn!" to him at least once a day and his favourite fake name to check into hotels is John President (which was George Clooney's idea, so when staff phone the room they have to call you Mr. President). Matt Damon's likeness, however, doesn't feature in the game.



THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

Remember everything. Forgive nothing

Talking trilogies, the *Shrek* trilogy has spawned no less than eight games. The *Bourne* trilogy currently has none. Tell us, is that fair? Of course it's not. Who's more suited to videogamedon? *Shrek*, a cranky ogre whose primary talent, as far as we can tell, is speaking with a half decent Scottish accent, or Jason Bourne, a malfunctioning 30 million dollar weapon who *kills people good*?

High Moon Studios knows the answer to that question, which is why it's currently developing *The Bourne Conspiracy*.

The best adaptations are the ones that go beyond the source material; ones that build a compelling back story and flesh out the events with credible, additional set pieces and complications. Just play *The Warriors*. It took the universe from the book and film and went deeper. *The Bourne Conspiracy* does the same. We're not privy to too many details

about the levels, but we do know one mission takes place a few days before Bourne's memory loss – sneaking around the docks in Marseilles, presumably for a little recon before the botched hit that ends with him floating in the ocean with two bullets in his back. Another takes place in the US Embassy in Zurich – although unlike the film it's a far more frenetic chase sequence (leaping across balconies, sliding under security gates and the like).

High Moon Studios, developer of the surprisingly decent vampire western *Darkwatch*, is going to great lengths to capture the energetic, shaky-cam pace of the films. A dynamic, cinematic camera will blend effortlessly between cut-scenes and gameplay, and zoom in for close-quarters combat.

The game looks to be a mash-up of stealth, gunfights and old-fashioned fistfights, although it's definitely the latter

we're most interested in.

The quick and uncompromising fight scenes in the Bourne films were incredible, and High Moon is attempting to faithfully distill them into *The Bourne Conspiracy*. There'll be a bunch of contextual finishing moves available, and Bourne will be able to weaponise (which, apparently, is a word) his environment to win scraps. His take down moves can supposedly be performed on up to three enemies at once.

The fact that we've had to wait this long for a Jason Bourne videogame is, frankly, balls. A character as truly badass as Bourne is positively ripe for videogame plundering, so kudos to High Moon for getting on with it.

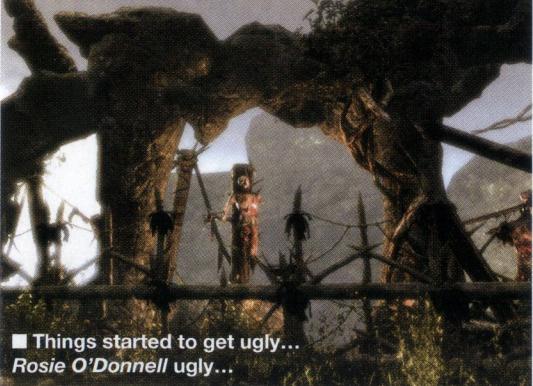
Whether *The Bourne Conspiracy* has the pedigree to trounce genre heavyweights like *Splinter Cell* is up for debate, but done well there's no reason it can't be a blast. **Luke Reilly**

INFO BYTE

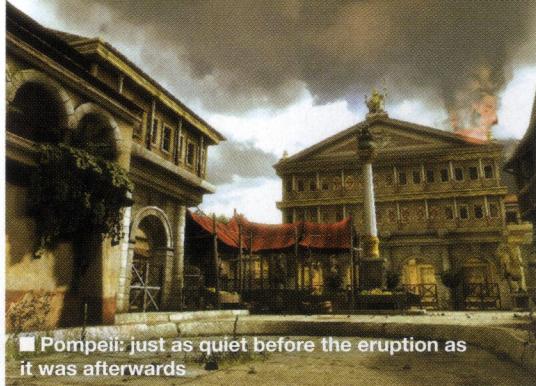
The Bourne films and books, although sharing the same titles, actually have very little in common aside from central characters and a few similar themes. In the books, Bourne isn't really an assassin...

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

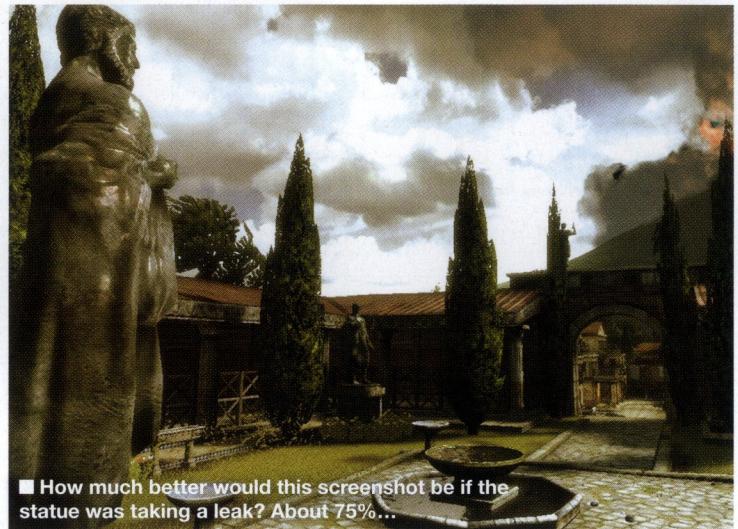
■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1 - TBA
■ RELEASE: EARLY 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
■ DEVELOPER: WIDESCREEN GAMES
■ WEB: www.highlanderthegame.com



■ Things started to get ugly...
Rosie O'Donnell ugly...



■ Pompeii: just as quiet before the eruption as it was afterwards



■ How much better would this screenshot be if the statue was taking a leak? About 75%...

HIGHLANDER

There can be only one...

Who wants to live forever? This was the completely redundant question asked by your Dad's favourite band Queen in the soundtrack to the hit movie *Highlander*. Yeah, um, let us think about that for a second. That's like asking, "Do you want a million dollars?" Or, "Would you like to watch Jessica Alba playing ping pong naked?" So yes, Mr. Mercury, Brian May and the rest of the 'Queen' gang, we *would* like to live forever. Thanks for asking.

But sadly, no matter how often you badger that once legendary band of yore, your chances of actually becoming an immortal are slimmer than a whippet's hard on. UNLESS, that is... you wait until 2008 and pick up a copy of *Highlander*, the new game from Atari based on the 1986 movie.

Yep, despite being released over 20 years ago, this legendary movie has been the focus of so many sequels, TV shows, and spin offs that it remains in the consciousness of popular culture to this day. We love *Highlander*, and can't wait to get our paws on this game.

Why? Well, check the setting: as an

immortal you get to play in present day New York, Pompeii (before the eruption), Samurai-era Japan, and, of course, Scotland, during the medieval ages. So, aye mah wee bonnie laddie, ye wull be able tae tear it up in the homeland of Connor MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod. Awesome, aye?

In actual fact you'll play through the entirety of *Highlander* as Owen MacLeod (who, we're taking a wild guess here, is possibly a relative of the Connor MacLeod in the original movie) and take part in many a high jink in a world that attempts to unite the muddy timelines and characters that populate the *Highlander* universe. Which means that storylines and characters from the crappy sequels, and the surprisingly crappier TV series will probably feature (boooooo...).

But that doesn't mean the game will suck! Or at least, not necessarily our fickle chums. With three different swords to master (the katana, the claymore, and double swords) and oodles of quickening techniques to master, such as Resurrection and Chi Balance, there's a decent chance *Highlander* could display a

little more than the usual hack and slash brain slush featured in your average third-person action games.

We are also intrigued to test out some of the techniques that have been outlined for *Highlander* so far, such as the 'freefall' and the 'swan dive'. We have a suspicion that at least one of these will resemble Altair from *Assassin's Creed*'s 'leap of faith', but we can't confirm anything at this early stage. Why? Well, the buggers at Atari haven't shown us anything yet! Damn them. **■ Mark Serrels**

WHAT THEY SAY:

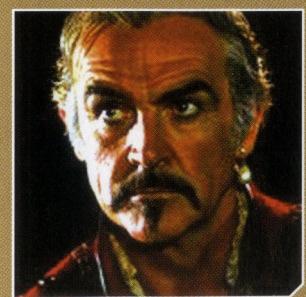
■ "Control an Immortal embroiled in a battle against rival Immortals in an adventure spanning over 2000 years."

WHAT WE SAY:

■ Where the hell is Sean Connery? We want to see 'The Spaniard' get some air time in this well overdue adaptation.

"YESH... I'M THE SHH-PANIARD..."

Okay, so we love the original *Highlander* as much as the next man, but there's no denying the complete idiocy of some of the casting choices made in that movie. Who in the bluest of blue hells had the 'awesome' idea of giving the only genuine Scotsman in the movie the role of 'The Spaniard', while giving a crappy half-arsed Frenchman the part of the 'Highlander'? Really, who does that? Don't they know that Sean Connery only has one accent? This is the dude who played a Russian submarine captain sounding like he was a bricke from the deepest, darkest depths of Glasgow. Yeah, that makes total sense.



■ Ooh... this looks scary! David Bowie from *Labyrinth* scary... those incisors are massive...



INFO BYTE

Highlander won the Academy Award for 'Best Movie Ever Made'.

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
 ■ PLAYERS: 1 (TBC)
 ■ RELEASE: LATE 2007
 ■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
 ■ DEVELOPER: SPARK UNLIMITED
 ■ WEB: www.codemasters.com



DROPPING DUDS

The Amerika Bomber project was actually a secret initiative of the Reichsluftfahrtministerium to build a long-range bomber for the Luftwaffe that would be capable of striking New York from bases in Germany. Requests for designs were made to the major German aircraft manufacturers early in World War II, long before the US had entered the war. A winner, the Junkers Ju 390, was selected for production, but only two prototypes were made before the program was scrapped. There is a heavily disputed claim that in early 1944 a Ju 390 made it from France to within 20km of the US coast and back again.



WHAT THEY SAY:

■ "[Strikes] a unique balance between wartime authenticity while also bringing a fresh perspective to the WWII genre through an alternate timeline and advanced weaponry."

WHAT WE SAY:

■ *Freedom Fighters* with Nazis instead of Russies? *Turning Point* has real sleeper hit potential.

TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

Liberty and justice for none...

At around 10:30pm on December 13, 1931, Winston Churchill was hit by a cab in New York City while crossing Fifth Avenue. Getting out of a car in the middle of the street, Churchill, forgetting cars drove on the opposite side of the road in the US, looked left instead of right. Thrown to the ground, he suffered a severe head wound and two cracked ribs – but lived and rallied the Brits against an imminent German invasion.

But what if he didn't live?

That's where *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* takes over. *Call of Duty: Finest Hour* developer Spark Unlimited has used this little known piece of trivia as a springboard for a brand new take on WWII shooters. With Churchill and his stirring speeches out of the picture the Brits surrender to Hitler. The US remains uninvolved, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour doesn't occur. For a decade the Atlantic Ocean is all that sits

between the Third Reich and the eastern US. In 1952? Blitzkrieg.

Nazi ships quickly take the harbour, Manhattan streets are bombed by advanced new German jet aircraft and Zeppelins deploy troops all over the city.

As an aside, you're not alone if you're presently thinking just how similar this all sounds to IO Interactive's 2004 cult hit *Freedom Fighters*. Like *Freedom Fighters* you don't play a soldier – you play as a regular citizen trying to survive the goose-stepping onslaught. Unlike *Freedom Fighters* however, it's a first-person shooter and there don't appear to be any squad controls. That said, during our brief glimpse we did spot a few occasions where the camera would switch to a conventional third-person perspective for shimmying along girders of half-constructed skyscrapers, disarming the Jerries and grabbing human shields. We saw Joe Citizen wrenching a gun from a

stormtrooper's grasp and tossing another off a Manhattan building. All the while buildings burned like giant matchsticks and German paratroops drifted to earth. It was all quite nifty actually.

The scope, as a special mention, is also particularly impressive. *Turning Point* manages to retain the essential elements of a good WWII shooter (read: Nazis) but places the action in a fresh battlefield – one we've never visited in this setting before. The advanced German tech soaring over the New York City skyline is a real design triumph – there's something incredibly striking about swastika-adorned Zeppelins floating past the Empire State Building and bombers dropping ordinance on the Statue of Liberty.

It's a brand new fight in a past that never happened, and we have to admit we're more than a little intrigued. We'll bring you more impressions when we get our hands on it. **Luke Reilly**



■ Stupid Nazis, they ruin everything...

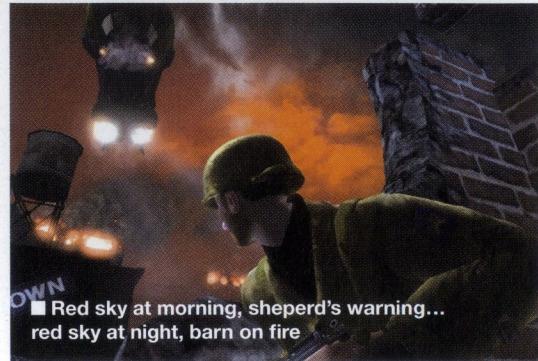


INFO BYTE

In 2002, the BBC conducted a poll to determine whom the public considers the 100 Greatest Britons of all time. Winston Churchill was number one.



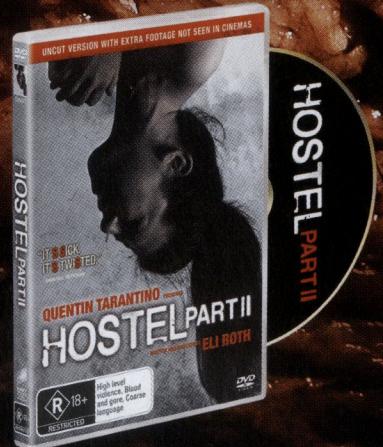
■ No ticket!



■ Red sky at morning, shepherd's warning...
 red sky at night, barn on fire

quentin tarantino
PRESENTS

ELI ROTH'S
HOSTEL PART II



Rent or Buy it on DVD October 24

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LIONSGATE

next

RAW NERVE

6

SCREEN GEMS

SONY
PICTURES
HOME
ENTERTAINMENT

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: FIGHTING
 ■ PLAYERS: 1-2
 ■ RELEASE: TBA 2008
 ■ DISTRIBUTOR: TBC
 ■ DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO
 ■ WEB: www.namcobandaigames.com



"ARRR, MY NAME BE ARTHUR"

Originally an unlockable fighter in III, Arthur wasn't exactly new to the series; he began life as a character replacement in the Korean version of *Soul Calibur*. Namco didn't want to include Mitsurugi because many Koreans despise the image of the samurai – something to do with repeated bloody invasion attempts. But seriously Namco, on a good day we can poop a better disguise than this one, he's just a dude in samurai armour, with an eye patch and a bad Paul Phoenix mullet.



SOUL CALIBUR IV

We enjoy games that feature women of this... calibur

Transcending history and the world, a tale of soul, sword and medieval breast augmentation, eternally retold. Yes, everyone's favourite weapons-based fighter is returning in its fifth, and quite possibly final, incarnation – and from the info and images we're seeing it's busting with ample new assets... uh... for the gameplay experience.

The big offering this time around is the online multiplayer mode that will finally let us slice and dice with challengers across the globe, and word has it that Project Soul has plans to support the "create-a-character" function in this mode too.

Which means you'll spend most of your time facing off against a billion Cloud Strife/Siegfried hybrids.

Details are sketchy on exactly how many main characters will be returning for this hurrah, but we can confirm that certain

crowd favourites will be in the roster like Mitsurugi, Ivy, Nightmare, Taki and Voldo. Bandai Namco is also bringing back the old school favourite Sophitia, in addition to a brand new character called Hildegarde – a knight chick that wields a flag spear and a short sword. In truth, she reminds us of a female version of Siegfried, which may be redundant because ol' Siegfried wasn't the most masculine fellow in the world to begin with.

Without spoiling it for the newcomers; the *Soul Calibur* storyline is a long running drama of various fighters who are questing (mostly) for the possession of the two über swords Soul Edge and Soul Calibur. Each of them have deep seeded motivations that fuel their need for this acquisition, but at the end of the day it's really just an excuse to chop, smash, and impale six shades of shit out of one another – which is what we're all about.

From our initial impressions the

fighting system doesn't seem to have been altered all that much, but we've been assured that Project Soul will be mixing in a couple of new surprises. In a welcome attempt to curb the trend of cheesy ring out victories, the arenas promise to be larger in scale and will include breakable objects which will offer distinct strategic advantages/disadvantages. Lastly, and more cryptically, we've been told there will be a new way to defeat opponents besides ring out or destroying their health gauge – harsh language perhaps?

All in all *Soul Calibur IV* is definitely on track with the visuals obviously looking sharper than the previous outing, as you might expect for a franchise which has always been at the forefront of graphical awesome. We must reaffirm, however, the conspicuous enlargement of some of the females. We're not complaining when we say this; but Taki could raise the eyebrows of a milking cow. **Adam Mathew**

WHAT THEY SAY:

■ "The battle of Soul Calibur and Soul Edge continues. Which sword will ultimately prevail?"

WHAT WE SAY:

■ As long as we get to stab somebody with at least one of them, we're really not that phased.



■ "Cover those things up, or taste my blade," said the jealous, flat chested Keira Knightley



■ The guys were all thinking the same thing: nip slip potential is high...



■ When the OPS guys hit the club, the girls go crazy.



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
 ■ PLAYERS: 1-16
 ■ RELEASE: EARLY 2008
 ■ DISTRIBUTOR: FANTASTIC
 ■ DEVELOPER: PROPAGANDA GAMES
 ■ WEB: propagandagames.go.com

INFO BYTE

Despite the fact that the last *Turok* ended on a cliffhanger, this game is a complete reboot of the series, and will not continue the storyline of previous *Turok* games.



TUROK

'Tu' on this...

Dinosaurs are a pretty big deal: they're enormous, scary, and back in the day they used to rule the planet. But then, roughly 65 million years ago, the lumbering idiots went and made themselves extinct for some reason or other and guess what – now we humans run things on Earth, bitches!

But it's almost as if we can't help feel a bit insecure, and even a little fearful of those towering beasts of prehistory; yeah, we're the pimp daddies of planet Earth now, but what would happen if, through some bizarre twist of fate or science, dinosaurs came back. Would we easily turn those gargantuan monstrosities into hamburgers, or would we immediately be cranked down a notch in the evolutionary food chain?

It's a human preoccupation that has brought us awesome movies, comic strips, and, in the form of the *Turok* series, videogames. Yep, *Turok* is all about the 'saur, and having spent some time with the game we can safely say that, on this count, *Turok* delivers in spades.

Picture the scene: you crash land in unfamiliar territory, surrounded by a jungle that is so dense and alive with sound that you can almost feel its heartbeat. You tread through the thick

foliage, grass trampling noisily underfoot, before eventually ploughing your way onto a spectacular vista, taking a brief second to admire the view before watching in amazement as an enormous Brontosaurus (the big one with the long neck) plunders through the scene, each prodigious step making a tremendous impact on the environment below.

But then there's the little guys, the anklebiters, like reptilian terriers snapping at your feet constantly. These guys will irritate, and eventually kill, if you don't dispose of them quickly. Despite the fact that these dinosaurs are smaller than most of their counterparts, the sense of fear is just as tangible – thanks to the brilliantly designed environments.

Because when the smaller dinosaurs shape up for attacks, you often can't see them directly, instead you have to bend your ears for the rustle of the grass, and check for the movements of each individual blade as they ready their charge. Quite often you have to aim not at the dinosaur themselves, but at the moving branches. It's a simultaneously cinematic and terrifying experience to be shooting at something you can't see, but it's a testament to the time spent in the development of the many intricate

environments seen in *Turok*.

And of course, how could we forget the King of the (prehistoric) jungle, the almighty T-rex. We were privy to two separate displays of its tyrannical power, and the impact was terrifying. The first encounter was from a purely voyeuristic perspective, as the big guy chowed down on some humans before high tailing it into the jungle. The second encounter was a more personal affair, as he knocked us on our arse a good couple of times, before deciding not to swallow us whole. While our attempt to inflict damage on the beast was the equivalent of tackling a rhino with a feather duster, we have been assured that weapons exist in the game that have the power to take the T-rex down for good. We can't wait to test those bad boys out. **■ Mark Serrels**

WHAT THEY SAY:

■ "Turok is an epic, story-driven first-person shooter set on a dark, mysterious planet in the future."

WHAT WE SAY:

■ Gorgeous interactive environments, and some sweet looking dinosaurs: so far so good.

'KNIFE' TO MEET YOU...

While the knife usually represents a 'last resort' weapon in most shooters – something to blindly swipe after running out of ammo – in *Turok*, the knife represents one of the most useful and deadly weapons in the game. It can be used effectively as a stealthy one hit kill, but also in the heat of close range action, the knife can be a brutal finishing weapon. On one occasion we managed to drive the knife directly into the brain of a Velociraptor that got a little too close for comfort, resulting in an instant, grisly death.



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PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: FIGHTING
■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
■ DEVELOPER: CYBERCONNECT2
■ WEB: www.atari.com



NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA 2

"Give her a real pounding, Shikamura!"

Naruto-nutters rejoice, because the belligerent blonde semi-demon and his crew are almost upon us for another dose of madcap, one-on-one mayhem. Between scrapping with Sasuke and love-tapping Temari, this is naturally fan-centric stuff but if you've yet to spend some time with anime's latest bugbear, hold up – the itchy combo system of the first game has been given a stiff ninja-kick to the loins (hoik!). Those dastardly Secret Techniques which so colourfully ape the over-the-top mid-battle montages of the series now require you to hammer rapidly on your \otimes and \odot buttons, spin the analogue knobs, and frantically enter button combinations before your opponent does to carry off that killer blow. While the sharp cel-shaded visuals and uniquely simplistic controls of the original

have remained untouched, the single player mode seems to have coped a drastic reworking. Instead of being able to pick whichever character you want and blaze through the story (a la 'Scenario' mode), you're now presented with 'Ultimate Road', which casts you in the role of whichever character happens to be in the spotlight at the time. Offsetting this is that you're given free reign to drag Naruto around between fights. Interacting with series favourites (yes, the entire voiceover cast are onboard and Naruto is the little bitch as ever), having a crack at mini-games, and kitting up Naruto's pad with bonus goodies bought with post-fight money mean there's a lot to keep you going even after you've had your arse handed to you by that chick with the pink hair. **Toby McCasker**



WHAT THEY SAY:

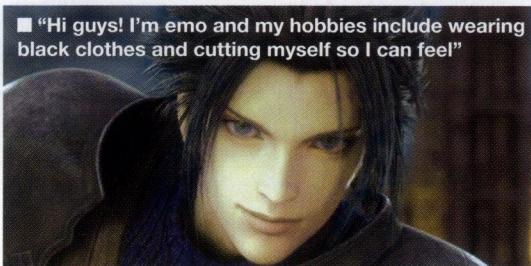
■ "Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 2 packs a devastating punch for fans of the franchise and anyone looking for a damn good punch-up"

WHAT WE SAY:

■ Looks to be more of the same frenetic, cel-shaded biff.

PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: RPG
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT
■ DEVELOPER: SQUARE-ENIX
■ WEB: www.square-enix.com



CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

Where 'Final' is as meaningful as the 'Neverending' in *The Neverending Story...*

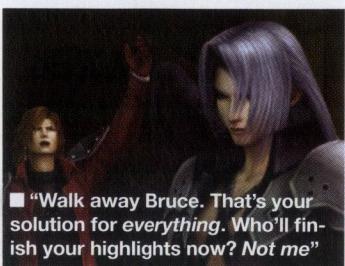
Despite the sensational instalments that have come from the *Final Fantasy* series, *Final Fantasy VII* has long been the fan favourite. With ten years having passed since it was released on the PSOne, Square-Enix is releasing a suite of titles based on the *FFVII* story across various platforms, including *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* for PSP.

Set five years before the events of *FFVII*, *Crisis Core* follows Zack, a long time friend and comrade of Cloud Strife. At this time, Cloud was just a new recruit to Shinra's military arm, SOLDIER, but Zack had already ascended to the elite ranks, often battling alongside the renowned warrior Sephiroth. *Crisis Core* goes into further detail and examines the events surrounding the infamous 'Nibelheim incident' that shook the world

of Gaia and changed it forever.

As you'd expect from Square-Enix, the game is presented in an extravagant cinematic style that continues to push the high visual standards that recent PSP titles have set. By the same token, the combat takes a departure from tradition and takes place in real time, adding a significant skill aspect to the previously pure strategy recipe.

Within a mere two weeks of its Japanese release, the game has already shifted in excess of 600,000 units and a similarly impressive 290,000-odd PSP systems – roughly 20 times the usual sales figures for the handheld. At this stage, it's clear to see that *CC: FFVII* is not only the ultimate in *Final Fantasy* fan service, but also an epic adventure in its own right. **Nick O'Shea**



WHAT THEY SAY:

■ "An exhilarating adventure filled with grandeur, and excitement."

WHAT WE SAY:

■ It's winning hearts, minds and wallets in Japan, and it's odds-on to do the same here.





PlayStation® 2

PSP™
PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION® 3

PlayStation®

Official Magazine Australia

ProStreet

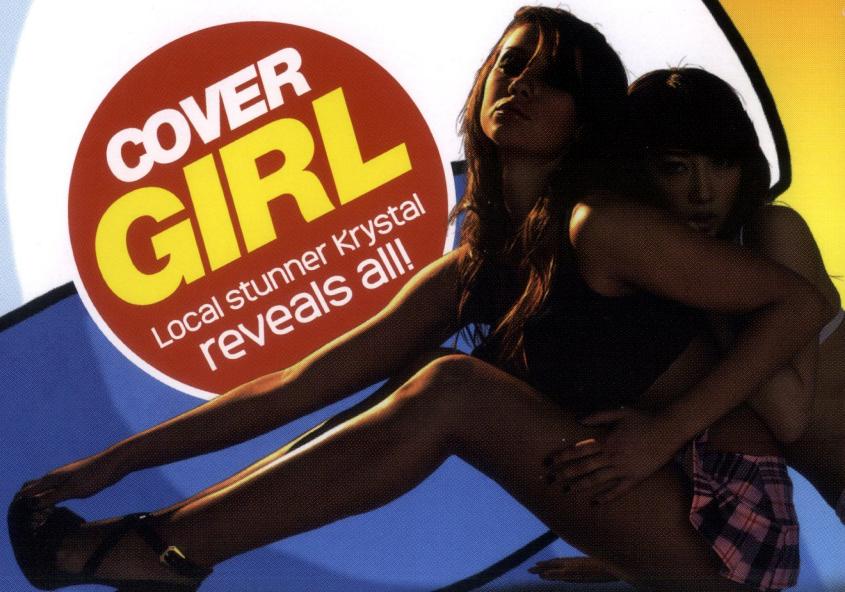
Why the new Need for Speed
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**COVER
GIRL**
Local stunner Krystal
reveals all!



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GROENING

PG

Mild Violence
Mild Coarse
Language

IN STORES NOVEMBER

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PlayStation.2

PSP
PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION.3

NINTENDO DS™

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■ GENRE: PLATFORMER
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: EA REDWOOD SHORES
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.eagames.com

■ BACK STORY: The *Simpsons* games have traditionally wallowed in mediocrity, haunted by the long shadow of that awesome arcade game everybody played. Can EA surprise us by producing a game worthy of the legendary TV show?

PS3 PS2 PSP
REVIEW



■ Robin Hood, Robin Hood, rolling through the glen!

THE SIMPSONS GAME

Funniest. Game. Ever.

Hello. The following review of *The Simpsons Game* is true. And by true, we mean – false. It's all lies. But they're entertaining lies. And in the end, isn't that the real truth? The answer is: No.

We love *The Simpsons*. It is the binding sticky stuff of our tiny little world, and that's a phenomenon universally shared by virtually everybody we've ever met. Frankly, we think that people who dislike *The Simpsons* must hide underground

with the c.h.u.d.s or the mole people; either that or the very concept of *Simpsons* hating is just make-believe, like elves, gremlins or Eskimos. But while we have mucho love for the show we definitely have some wrath-issues with the shoddy, "Krusty-brand-imitation" game conversions that we've had to suffer these past few years.

But when we heard that EA was designing a new PS3 *Simpsons* title, one that was also "being released"

on the Amiga and Intellivision, and had all the voice actors and writers closely involved – we were supremely confident that it was going to be an epic experience that couldn't "possibly" go wrong....

"MY CAT'S BREATH SMELLS LIKE CAT FOOD"

The plot opens with Marge shafting Bart out of his copy of a super violent videogame called Grand Theft Scratchy. As the depressed

Bart is trudging home he stumbles across a game manual that tells him that he and the rest of the family are themselves characters in a game right this minute and, better yet, they have special powers. The narrative is like this the whole way through, it's a constant self referencing satire that pokes fun at videogames and gaming culture, along with taking the usual potshots at Fox, religion, politics and even Matt Groening himself. It's a refreshingly honest pisstake of the

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - Australia

**BRONZE
AWARD**
8/10



■ No wonder Zelda wanted to be 'just friends'



usual craptacular Simpsons games that we've played before; that is of course with the exception of *Hit & Run* – which was, in our opinion, cooler than the name entry section of *Bonestorm*.

Speaking of *Hit & Run*, this game also features a free roaming Springfield level, but this time it just serves as a hub for the main levels (and disappointingly you can't carjack people anymore). Moving away from the GTA stylings of the previous game, the bulk of the gameplay here is more akin to a 3D version of the old Simpsons arcade beat 'em up. You're given two characters at a time that have basic, two button attack combos and you can switch between them on the fly to solve various character-centric puzzles. The fisticuff antics aren't terribly deep, but thankfully as you progress through the story the family discovers even more abilities through their game manual.

Homer discovers he has an enemy stunning burp and can turn himself into a fat obstacle-smashing blob. He can bowl

himself around with a fair degree of speed too, which is impressive for the fattest lard ass in chub town. Bart has a ranged slingshot attack, and becomes Bartman to scale certain walls and use his cape to glide around. Lisa uses her saxophone (not a tubamaba, or an oboemaboe) to make enemies attack each other, and has the power of the Buddha hand which offers her a Jeebus/God's eye view of things and the ability to manipulate large objects. Like Lisa, Marge is also quite a different experience from the guys. She has the ability to rally people to her moral cause with a megaphone and can recruit around 20 Springfieldians to do her ironically violent bidding. She can also send Maggie into crawl spaces to circumvent security and solve puzzles.

If that isn't enough, each character can enter a powered up state too, which enhances their melee attacks for a limited time. While even in her powered up "Clobber Girl" state the Lisa levels are the poorest offering, the biggest surprise here

"[the] game lasts about as long as a booger does in Ralph's nose."

is that EA has actually managed to make playing as Marge rather entertaining.

MORE EYE CANDY THAN THE LAND OF CHOCOLATE...

Up until this point the Simpsons have been pretty poorly represented graphics-wise, with the efforts thus far being poorly rendered or pixelated; a view shared with us by the designers, who devote a considerable chunk of in-game cutscene to pointing it out. Thankfully, they've managed to fix all that this time around with a vastly superior 2D/3D cel-shading technique that all but replicates the visuals of the TV show. They've painstakingly animated roughly 140 iconic Springfield characters to absolute perfection.

Aside from the usual "town of Springfield" environments, the game features levels that parody popular videogames which means the visual landscape is always fresh and changing. For example, "Neverquest" harkens back to ye olde fantasy RPGs and takes a shot at dungeon crawlers, *Gauntlet*, *Zelda* and general Hobbit culture. "Medal of Homer" has Homer and Bart fighting in a WWII war zone



■ "Yarr... the dolphins... have red eyes... and are quite scary... yarr..."



STICKIN' IT TO THE MAN

The Simpsons' cast has a much-publicised love/hate relationship with 20th Century Fox. The writers always take the opportunity to send-up Rupert Murdoch or bag out Fox's shoddy programme line-up – and here's why.

With Matt Groening's support, the main cast members have been involved in lengthy pay disputes with Fox on more than one occasion. In 1998, after threatening strikes, they negotiated a salary increase from \$30,000 per episode to \$125,000. The work stoppages continued again later however when the cast asked for an increase in their pay to \$360,000 per episode. The actors did eventually "reach an agreement" with Fox.



"Completionists will undoubtedly have their own personal whacking day..."

alongside the Hellfish in an attempt to thwart ze Germans and liberate some cheese eating surrender monkeys (poor Frenchies...).

During the action everything looks perfect; however the close-up mid level cut-scenes can become as mixed an offering as our old friend Mr. McGregor (with a leg for an arm and an arm for a leg). This is due to the movies occasionally featuring a shot of a character's face at an awkward angle which can have the undesirable effect of making them look like a

poorly drawn flash game. Admittedly it's a rare occurrence that isn't "The Big Book of British Smiles" ugly, but it is noticeable from time to time. But that's a minor whinge – by and large the game looks fantastic and it's truly bizarre to think that it took this much time, and the graphical grunt of the PS3, to finally nail a true Simpsons 2D look.

"EAT FIST, LARD CROTCH!"

This Simpsons outing has some of the best audio we've heard in a game for a long time, and no, it's not because it is in ear splitting Dolby 8.94. It's exceptional because the game is jam packed (mmm... jam packed) with a plethora of awesome one liners from the show.

There's also a bevy of new material that is easily on par with the quality writing of the show; like the level inside a solar system exhibit which featured a monotonous P.A. guy droning on with a stream of boring solar system facts before blurting out, "An asteroid belt separates the four inner planets from the five outer planets – my belt separates my gut from my junk". Now that's gold.

All in all it's obvious the writers put some effort into it, and similarly the voice actors do their performances with a degree of enthusiasm that gives the impression they were keen to be onboard with a quality project – as opposed to voicing for some half-arsed cheesy spin-off game like *The Simpsons Wrestling*, *Waterworld: The Arcade Game* or *Lee Carvallo's Putting Challenge*.

Another area that has received a great deal of attention is the musical score in each of the themed levels. Whether it's the dreamy melodic strains of the land of chocolate or the slick James Bond-



esque Bartman theme, it's obvious that the composers took the initiative to diversify rather than cop out and using variations of a generic "wacky" music track. It's like we said before: Best. Audio. Ever. It's just a pity that it doesn't last longer...

I HOPE I DIDN'T BRAIN MY DAMAGE...

We won't lie to you; the main game lasts about as long as a booger does in Ralph's nose. We managed to clock the main storyline in roughly six hours, which left the progress percentage at around 54% – but don't freak out just yet, because people can use statistics to prove anything (14% of people know that). It's possible to squeeze more longevity out of the proceedings by replaying the levels with a friend in the two-player co-op, hunting down the various collectibles, or there's the option for some special time attack challenges.

The cooperative mode is quite reminiscent of the *LEGO Star Wars* experience, with a drop in/drop out

option and a focus on working together to pummel the hordes of enemies before separating to use your various abilities to solve the puzzles. Unfortunately you're both stuck with using certain characters on certain levels. This initially sounded like the suckiest suck that ever sucked; but given the obstacles and skills-centric designs of the levels it eventually made perfect sense.

Completionists will undoubtedly have their own personal whacking day here with the massive amount of collectibles to be found for each character; Homer collects Duff beer bottle caps and novelty beer, Bart has Krusty comic books and movie posters, Lisa collects flowers and Malibu Staceys, and Marge is after shop-a-docket coupons and hair products. Some of these are scattered throughout the parody levels but most are hidden throughout the vast Springfield hub level. The annoying thing is you'll have to be a particular character to pick up their collectible, which can be a bitch because you'll continually have to backtrack to find a bus stop to swap to the correct

Simpsons family member.

Also, there are videogame clichés to collect, which are basically piss funny Comic Book Guy complaints about unoriginal aspects of the game, like ubiquitous crates, spawning enemies, switches and the annoying problems with collectible pickups... and...er, wait a second...

STUPID LIKE A FOX!

Speaking of criticising videogames while being morbidly obese and still living with your parents, we have some issues of our own to voice. The biggest problem is the inherent issues that come with navigating in a 2D/3D hybrid platformer; that problem is depth perception. We guarantee you'll have some Hans Moleman moments as you attempt to squint-calculate the distances in some of the bottomless pit jumpy sections. This problem is made exponentially worse by a camera system that both sucks and blows. More often than not it will start you with a cruddy angle, thereby forcing you to do more manual camera work than the non-union

Mexican director Señor Spielberg. But even after you swing it around yourself, it may get snagged on an invisible barrier and frustratingly auto-default back to its original position.

But even with these occasional issues, it's hard to deny the charm of this game, especially in the way it salutes the ghosts of games past and the way it mercilessly takes the piss out of every aspect of the industry. No one is safe – not even the cash-stomping EA itself.

In this world of intelligence-insulting media spin and corporate propaganda, we can't tell you how refreshing it is to see an über-corporation like EA let a self-deprecating title like this pass through its own censors. They certainly do a number on themselves, and we wouldn't be surprised to hear if someone got fired by the higher-ups for going overboard with the anti-EA gags. This being the case; you owe it to yourself to experience a game that can deliver this amount of comedy, fun and controversy without resorting to AKs and stomping prostitutes.

– Adam Mathew



RESPECTING YOUR ELDERS SON

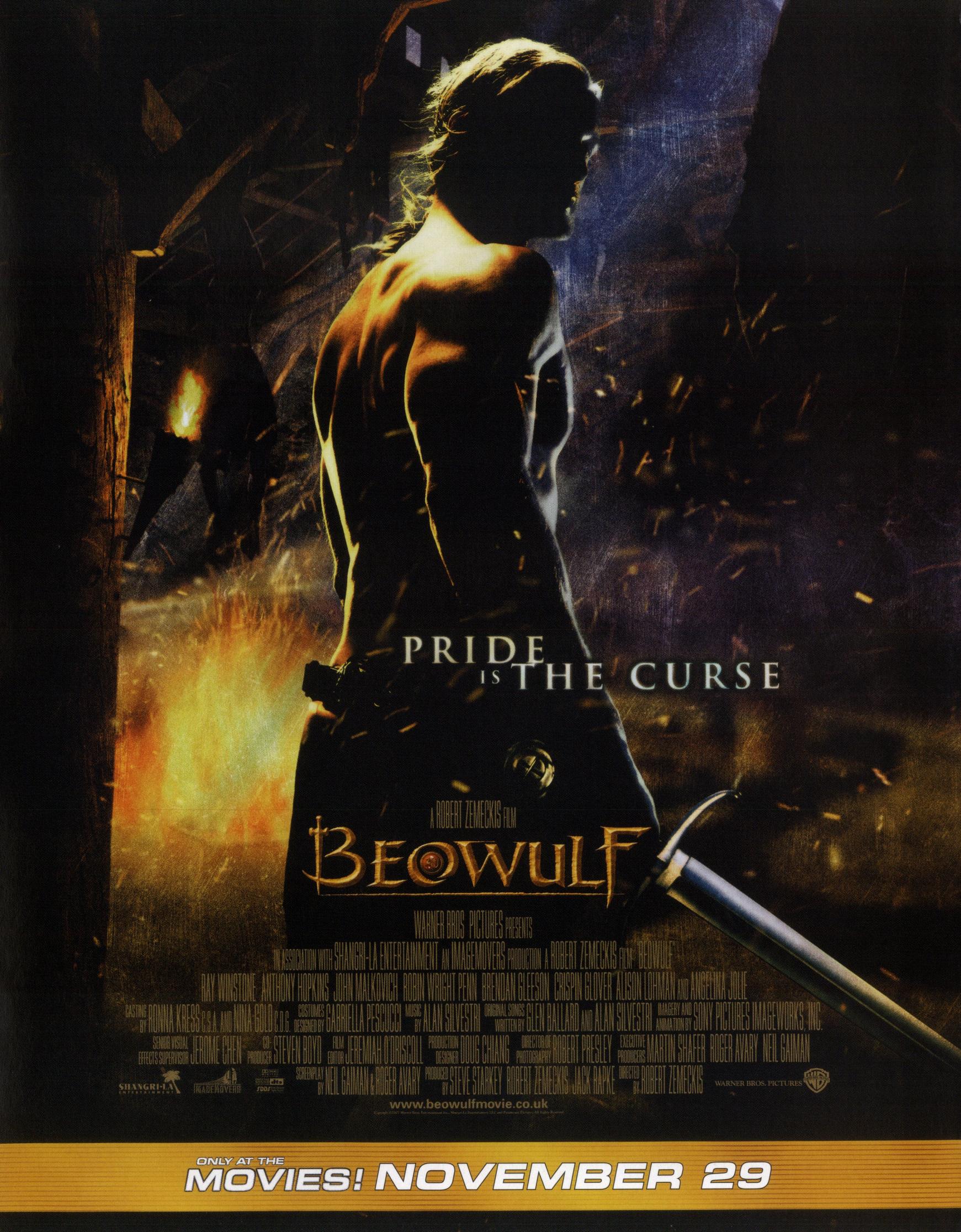
Being set in a videogame environment *The Simpsons Game* lovingly lampoons a huge amount of classic videogames from the previous generation and even further back into yesteryear. Here are some references to look out for: *The Shadow of Colossus* level with Lard Lad, Getting across a river a la *Frogger*, Having a super happy good fun time *Katamari Damacy* style, being mauled by *Madden* jocks and the odd *Streetfighter*, hitting up some *Mario Bros.*, sewer pipe teleportation, and pimpin' da love in *San Andreas* – to mention just a few. Whoever designed things certainly did their homework...



| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| PROS: | CONS: |
| ■ Looks like a TV episode | ■ Too short and sweet |
| ■ Hilarious game interpretation | ■ Maddening camera system |

VERDICT: A bit short, but easily the greatest Simpsons game to date.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
08



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SMOKIN' ACES

Punch it

Someone has lit a fire beneath EA. Honesty; we don't think we could be more surprised with EA's upcoming line-up. In the past, despite its commercial success, the mega-corp has never been far from criticism. Since its pioneering beginnings cookie-cutter sequels and safe, shallow mass-market titles have become more and more frequent.

But there's a welcome change in the air. EA got on board with MTV and *Rock Band*, a game from the creators of *Guitar Hero* that does everything their former wunderkind does and much, much more. It proved comedy and parody was alive and well with *The Simpsons Game*, a simple LEGO Star Wars-styled romp where no game (EA published or otherwise) is spared from a good-natured ribbing. EA Black Box has been doing more than its fair share too, stumping up the revolutionary *SKATE* (without exaggeration, we cannot stress enough how impressive this game is – or just how far ahead of the *Tony Hawk* series *SKATE* is after ONE game) AND *Need for Speed ProStreet*, a brand new take on the ever-popular franchise.

SMOKE 'EM IF YOU'VE GOT 'EM

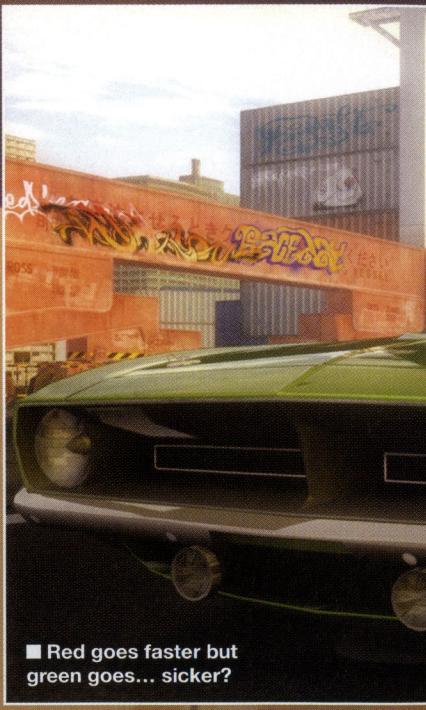
Without a shadow of a doubt, the single most

impressive thing about *ProStreet* (although there's plenty to raise your eyebrows) is the smoke. The screens on the page go some of the way illustrating just how incredible it looks in the game – but wait until you see it in action. The effect of the amazing smoke effects on the game experience is marked – it doesn't just make the game look more authentic, it makes it feel more authentic. You really feel like you're in full contact with the road and that you're part of the environment – not just a detached object zipping across a painted-on background. Plenty of racing games have tacked on the odd puff of smoke, but this is a veritable quantum leap compared to them. The thick white tyre smoke wraps around furiously spinning tyres, wafting under wheel arches and hovering in the air for some time afterwards. For the first time we

can think off, pulling doughnuts on screen feels uncannily realistic – your screeching rubber constantly pumps plumes of smoke into the air which your circling car pierces through as it turns. You can practically smell it...

LIFE'S A DRAG

It's beyond us why, but EA omitted drag racing from *Need for Speed Carbon*, the last instalment of the series. Making the same mistake, Juice Games left it out of *Juiced 2* as well. This could be costly, because after its short hiatus, drag racing is coming back to the *NFS* series – and it's coming back in a big way. Unlike *NFS* games of yore that took the steering out of your hands, instead leaving you to concentrate on acceleration, shifting and changing lanes, *ProStreet* puts you in complete control. The drag racing in *ProStreet* is of the more



"You really feel like you're in full contact with the road and that you're part of the environment – not just a detached object zipping across a painted-on background."



■ "Arrggh! I just spilt my macchiato"

traditional variety – rather than three opponents you'll just have one, and the distance looks as if it's strictly a quarter mile. Before each race you'll need to run through a brief mini-game to heat your tyres. A green bar will move along your tacho and you'll need to work the throttle and match the revs to it as best you can. The better you do here the bigger the sweet spot will be in your rev range to get a perfect start. After your rubber is warmed up you need to keep your revs in the sweet spot and dump it into first the moment the grid girl drops her arms. At this stage you give it the beans, time your shifts and wait for the perfect moment to engage your nitro. Because you can manage your own direction, a little unsportsmanlike blocking is also possible. Interestingly we even uncovered a wheelie competition later on, strictly reserved for rear-wheel drive muscle juggernauts where the object is to bury the throttle and get the nose skyward for as long as possible – which is stupidly fun. There are a bevy of other events, including the new speed races (flat out, high-speed burns along closed roads)

and radically improved drift races (the handling has been overhauled so the cars don't handle like fat women clambering out of bath tubs).

LIFE IS A HIGHWAY

Overhauled, you say? Yes. And noticeably. It still feels like *NFS*, but for the first time EA is dipping its toes in sim territory for a few pointers. There'll be three levels of handling available for the novice up to the expert and it will also feature a number of optional driving aids like braking assistance and stability control. It's far more fun with these off (particularly in the powerful rear-wheel drive cars as you're able to use a combination of throttle and oversteer to round bends), but they'll be welcome for *NFS* newbies.

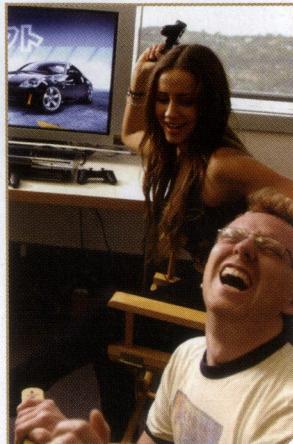
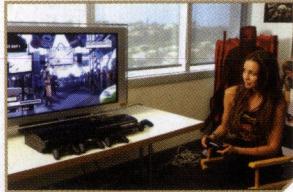
All things considered we came away very impressed after our hands-on. The final game will feature over 60 cars from over 25 manufacturers, including the new *Evo X*, the *Nissan GT-R PROTO* and just a sprinkling of supercars this time around to keep them rare. Like we've previously mentioned, it's also the first *NFS* since *Porsche Unleashed* to feature damage and terminal damage at that.

So *ProStreet* wants to be taken seriously? Well, it's off to a good start. EA? You have our attention. □ Luke Reilly



KRYSTAL'S GOT BALLS

Big Brother alumni and face of *ProStreet* Krystal Forscutt popped into OPS Towers to challenge the team to a few friendly races. We certainly admire her sass, so we did the only gentlemanly thing which, naturally, was let her win. It was partly because we harboured the slim hope that when she did win she'd pull her shirt up over her head and run around the office hooting (in retrospect, we probably shouldn't have been surprised that didn't happen) and partly because Mark had forgotten his glasses. He loved having his hair pulled. Takes him back, apparently (to what, we're not sure).



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Today's head

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- ▶ Tom Morello In Guita H
- ▶ Rumour: Online Co-Op Mo
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Reviews

NEW MOVIE AND DVD SECTION!

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BEOWULF HITS CINEMAS
NOVEMBER 29TH!



CRY WULF

GIVE US A SHOUT AND WIN THIS INCREDIBLE SWAG OF BEOWULF AND PLAYSTATION®3 GEAR!

We're going to throw a few concepts at you and see if you like them. A CGI film that's not aimed at toddlers. Free movie tickets. Angelina Jolie... naked. Free games. Swords, dragons, magic and buckets of violence. A free PS3!

Like the sound of that? Hell yeah, you do. You're probably lying on the ground twitching right now from the side-effects of an awesome-overdose. What? An awesome-overdose is a real disease with proper doctors and medicine and everything. Look it up.

Directed by Hollywood heavyweight Robert Zemeckis, *Beowulf* is filmed entirely in CGI and uses the same motion-capture technology as *Heavenly Sword* to digitally recreate its stars (Angelina Jolie, Anthony Hopkins and John Malkovich) in incredible lifelike detail. Both the movie and the game are releasing on 29 November and will be a must for everyone who digs fantasy and cutting-edge computer graphics.

Thanks to Ubisoft and Roadshow we've got 20 *Beowulf* cinema double passes, 10 copies of the game and one spanking new 60GB PS3 console to giveaway. One insanely lucky winner will score the PS3, as well as the game and tickets to the movie, with the rest of the swag being split between 19 lucky runners up. To enter this competition all you have to do is answer the question below, follow the entry details on this page and mark you entries 'Beowulf giveaway'.

ANGELINA JOLIE IS MARRIED TO WHICH HOLLYWOOD HUNK?
A. BEN STILLER B. BRAD PITT C. BRYAN BROWN



**WIN
A PS3!
PLUS BEOWULF
GAMES
AND MOVIE
PASSES!**

HOW TO ENTER

Send entries to ops@derwenthoward.com.au with the name of the competition in the subject line, enter at www.gameplayer.com.au or post them to OPS Magazine, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355 with the name of the competition CLEARLY MARKED on the envelope. Alternatively head to www.gameplayer.com.au and enter all promos there. Include the name of the competition, your name, age, email address, contact number, and more importantly, your full address and postcode! All competitions close on November 23. All competitions are open to residents of Australia and New Zealand.

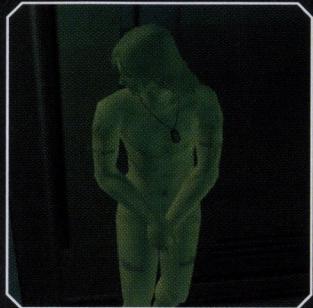
GREAT GAMING RIP OFFS

WORDS: LUKE REILLY

METAL GEAR SOLID 2

thumbs up

Life is full of rip-offs. Taxes. Food at the movies. Damn carnies and their rigged sideshows. Those guys on the street with three cups (hint: the ball isn't in the middle cup. It isn't in any of the cups. He's screwing you over). Unfortunately, games are no exception. There have been plenty of moments where we've been left feeling ripped-off, and we don't imagine we're alone.



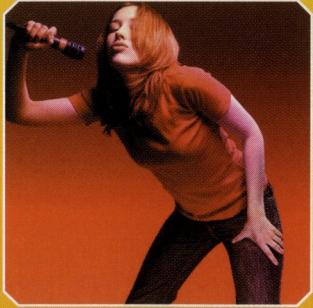
thumbs down

Unfortunately, shortly afterwards Snake is replaced with the painfully mincy Raiden for the rest of the game – a man whose primary talents seem to include 'whining' and 'looking like a girl'. We'd have a hard time taking this nancy boy seriously in a Head 'n' Shoulders commercial let alone an action blockbuster. Get bent, girly man.

SINGSTAR BABES

thumbs up

According to any and all *SingStar* promo material, only impossibly beautiful people and their equally impossibly beautiful friends play *SingStar*. They wear loads of sexy make-up, don their kinkiest heels and tightest pants, put on a sultry pout and make love to the microphone, like it's a... well, you know.



thumbs down

All the really hot girls are sleeping with record company CEOs. We get the leftovers. Urrrgh...

TMNT

thumbs up

The coolest cartoon from our childhood brought back to life thanks to the creators of the *Prince of Persia* resurrection. Our hopes for the first decent Turtles game since the madcap four-player frenzy of 1991's *Turtles in Time* were reigned in, and with today's powerful hardware we couldn't wait to see what was possible.



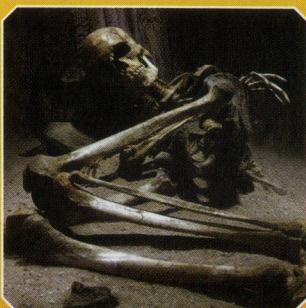
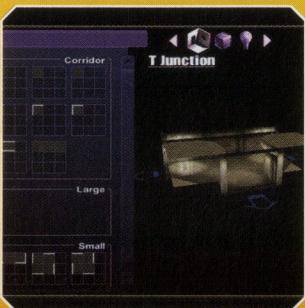
thumbs down

Single-player only?! World's most fearsome fighting team? There's no 'I' in team! Whoops, huh?

MAP MAKERS

thumbs up

You can make your own maps? You can MAKE your OWN MAPS! Surely we have reached the very zenith of videogame achievement – the point where we build them ourselves. With an infinite supply of ever-changing and always different maps we'll be nigh on unstoppable.



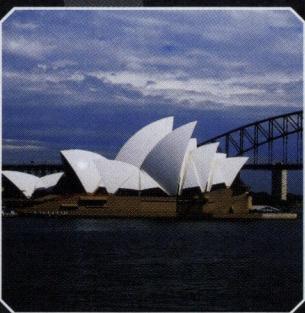
thumbs down

It takes forever...

TEAM BONDI

thumbs up

When Brendan McNamara, director of *The Getaway* and former boss of Team SOHO in London, left the UK to head back down under and found Team Bondi we entertained hopes of a Sydney-based crime epic. Possibly starring Bryan Brown. He's tops at swearing.



thumbs down

Who leaves London to set up in Sydney and make a game based in LA? Come on! They're not even based in Bondi you know. Actually, they're probably reading this. Ah, we're just taking the piss guys. Still, Sydney. Best city in the world, just putting that out there.

AC/DC

thumbs up

The pioneers of hard rock, Australia's own AC/DC have sold around 150 million albums worldwide and are one of the greatest acts in music history. *Guitar Hero* is a celebration of rock and all it has to offer, so to many it would seem like a match made in heaven. It does to us anyway. And we're all sober. Mostly.



thumbs down

No dice. No AC/DC in *Guitar Hero III*. What gives? They dressed up Arnold Schwarzenegger like a schoolboy for a video clip for *Last Action Hero* but won't be bought for *Guitar Hero*? They had a song in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* for crying out loud! Let there be rock! LET THERE BE ROCK! Sniff...

LOCOROCO COCORECCHO

thumbs up

The follow-up to the engaging and addictive PSP hit *LocoRoco*; making *LocoRoco* work on the PS3 with the SIXAXIS seems like an absolute gimme. A game where you tilt the world married with a motion-sensing controller that we can use to, you know... *tilt the world?* Duh! How can it not succeed?



thumbs down

The answer is by f**king with the formula. How can you take the happiest game ever and make it the most frustrating game ever? You don't tilt the world. You don't even control the LocoRoco – just butterflies herding them around. It just makes you want to dropkick babies. It really does...

LAIR

thumbs up

Promises of unhinged aerial dragon battles, scorchingly super-crisp 1080p visuals and high adventure had some of us salivating at the prospect of *Lair*. It truly did look the part. Up until we put it in our PS3 of course...



thumbs down

Turns out *Lair* doesn't actually look that good outside of cut-scenes. Turns out it doesn't control that well either. Turns out *Lair* is actually pretty dire. Please, no sequel necessary. Please...

NUDE RAIDER

thumbs up

If there's one thing better than a spunky woman with clothes on, it's a spunky woman with no clothes on. And carrying guns. The existence of a nude cheat for *Tomb Raider* makes your nether regions ache and at the ripe age of 13 you're willing to give anything a go. You race into your room to try it out.



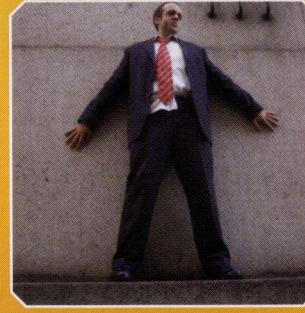
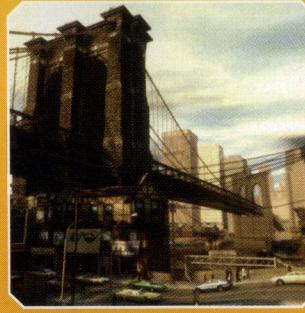
thumbs down

It doesn't work. Naked mods abound, but there's no push-button code. Also, your mum is wondering why you're not wearing pants. Just saying...

GTAIV DELAY

thumbs up

Grand Theft Auto IV is mere weeks from striking store shelves with the force of a rogue meteorite. Your pre-order? Paid. Your calendar? Marked. Phone? Unplugged. Dog? Cat? Taped and corked. Now we play the waiting game.



thumbs down

Delayed?! Next year?! Wwwwhhhyyyy!!!??!!

TOY STORY GRAPHICS

thumbs up

Remember the *Toy Story* quality graphics we were promised way back before the PS2 was released?



thumbs down

Didn't really happen, did it?



BEYOND REVENGE LIES REDEMPTION

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Or will you let revenge consume you before the heavenly sword does?

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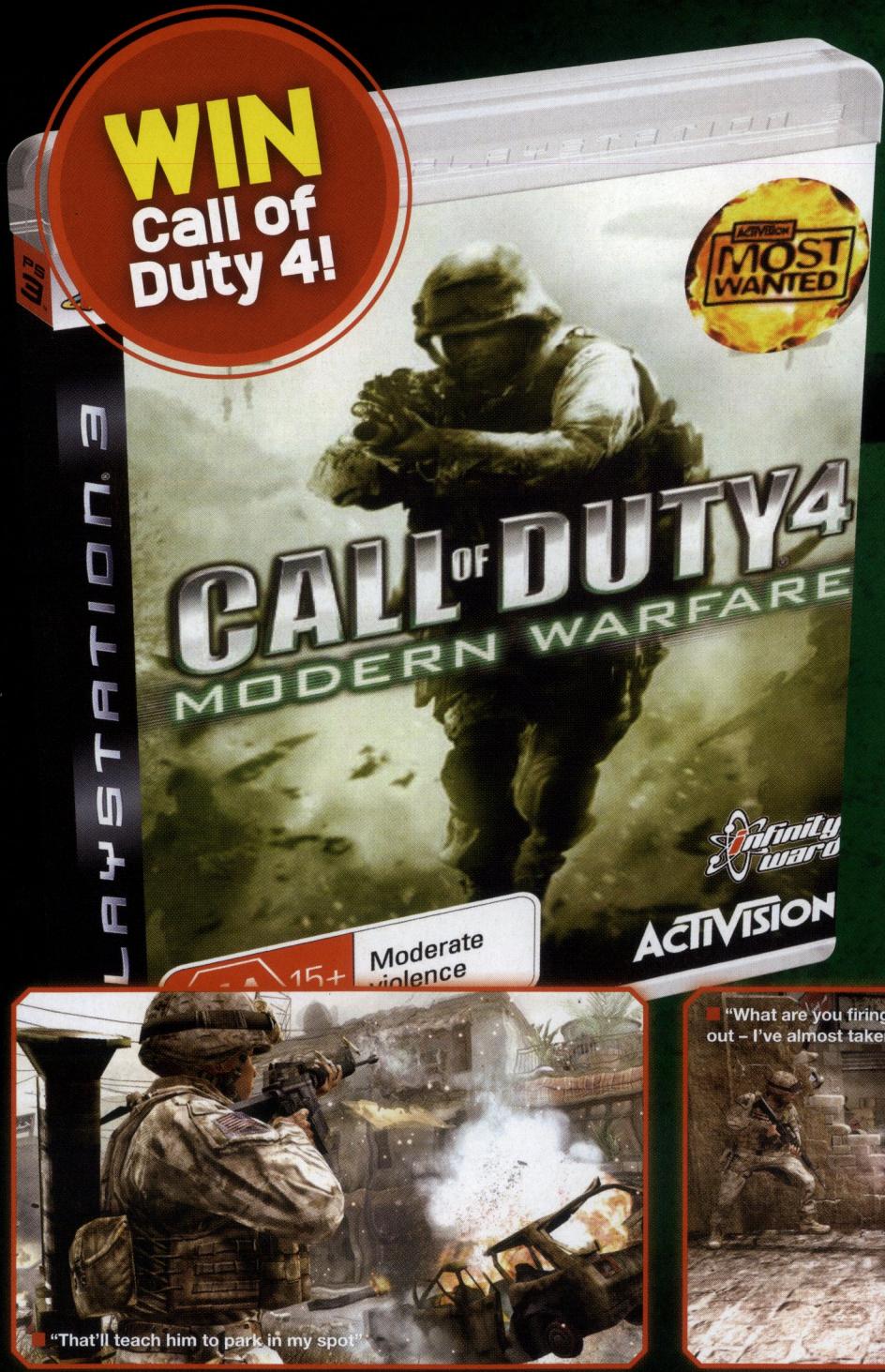


This is living

PLAYSTATION 3

SURVEY SAYS...

Fill in this quick survey for your chance to win copies of *COD4*!



Call us curious but we'd like to know more about you. How do you play your games? Which parts of the mag do you love? Which ones do you hate? Basically we'd like you to tell us a little bit about yourselves and what you want from this magazine.

Even though we know everyone loves to talk about themselves we've also gone out and secured a little extra incentive for you to fill out our survey. And by "little" we mean absolutely brain-meltingly huge! Thanks to the top blokes at Activision we've got the un-fricking-believable, 10-out-of-10, Game of the Year, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* to be given away to 10 of you lucky buggers. Flick to page 76 to read the review of this incredible game.

To enter this competition all you need to do is email us your survey answers (in the format of 1 a), 2 c) etc.) or fill in the actual pages, cut them out and send them to us. Mark all entries "OPS Survey" and follow the entry details on page 22.

1. Do you own a PS3?

- A. Yes
- B. No but I'm getting one soon
- C. I'll probably get one next year
- D. I don't have any plans to get one

2. Which are you most interested in reading about?

- A. PlayStation 2
- B. PlayStation 3
- C. PlayStation Portable
- D. All of the above

3. How useful did you find the PS3 Blu-ray demo disc?

- A. Huge – They were the main reason I bought the magazine
- B. Decent – I enjoyed playing them
- C. Not much – I'd already downloaded the demos from PSN
- D. Pointless – I'm only interested in PS2 demo discs

4. What is the best feature of the PS3 Blu-ray demo discs?

- A. I like to keep PS3 demos without filling up my harddrive
- B. I can play PS3 demos without maxing out my download limit
- C. I don't have broadband so it's the only way I can get the demos
- D. I just like collecting them

5. How much do you use the online PlayStation Store?

- A. Every week – I download everything I can
- B. Often – When I see something good
- C. Rarely – I don't like much on there
- D. Never – I don't see the point

5. What other free items would you like to see included with the mag? (Please list your favourite three)

- A. Pens
- B. Posters
- C. Stickers
- D. Cheat books
- E. Key rings
- F. USB sticks
- G. Bottle openers
- H. T-shirts
- I. Caps
- J. Beanies
- K. Tattoos
- L. Playing cards
- M. Badges
- N. YoYos

6. What sort of internet access do you have?

- A. ADSL2
- B. Cable or ADSL
- C. Dial-up
- D. None

5. What do you think about the magazine's price?

- A. Amazing value
- B. I'm okay with it
- C. A little expensive
- D. Far too expensive

5. How old are you?

- A. 15 or under
- B. 16-20
- C. 21-25
- D. 26 or older

5. How many games do you buy a year?

- A. 1-2
- B. 3-5
- C. 6-10
- D. More than 10

5. What's the biggest factor in deciding to buy the mag?

- A. The free stuff (demo discs, cheat books etc)
- B. Games I'm interested in are being reviewed
- C. Games I'm interested in are being previewed
- D. The giveaways (Win a PS3 & games etc.)

5. Do plastic bags around the mag affect your decision to buy the mag?

- A. Big time – I can't stand not being able to flick through the mag
- B. Sometimes – I'd prefer not to have them
- C. Not really – I'm happy deciding based off info on the bag
- D. Never – The bags make no difference to me

5. How would you rate the Buzz section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the How To section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Features section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Preview section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Online section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was

- more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Review section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Film section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Tech section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Cheats section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

5. How would you rate the Database section?

- A. Unreal – Main reason I buy the mag
- B. Great – I wish there was more of it
- C. Okay – Could be better
- D. Terrible – Should be scrapped

Thanks guys, you've just helped us make OPS an even better magazine for you.

FOR THE THOUSANDS IN ATTENDANCE... AND THE MILLIONS WATCHING AROUND THE WORLD... LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... LETS GET...

READY TO

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the greatest show on earth, the arena of kings, the squared circle of majesty, where the gods of gaming don the pugilist mantle, and duke it out en masse for the ultimate prize in gaming, the right to call themselves the undisputed daddy of their respective genres...

For many have argued, since the dawn of videogaming time, who or what is best: Sam Fisher or Solid Snake,

FIFA or *Pro Evo*, *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter*, *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill*... The battlefield of videogaming debate is strewn with the casualties of such rivalries. Who is the best of the best? We're about to find out...

Videogaming is built on rivalries, some that have existed for as long as we can remember. Now is the time, here is the place, we're going to take every significant gaming rivalry and pit them against each other in

a bloody fist fight to the death, mano a mano. Who will win? Who will be the last man/woman standing... who knows? You can cut the tension with a knife. Read on McDuff, for the results of the most significant bouts in the world of gaming.

The bell has sounded; let's get it on!

ROUND 1... FIGHT!

Pro Evo vs. FIFA



TALE OF THE TAPE

| | FIFA | PRO EVO |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Consistently awesome gameplay? | Possibly | Yes, yes, yes! |
| Licensed teams? | In abundance... | Kinda... some |
| Wealth of options? | Superb | Passable |

PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

A historical match up that has fascinated sports nuts for years now. History undoubtedly favours *Pro Evo*, with hardcore soccer fans consistently siding with the in-depth gameplay of Konami's *Pro Evo* over the flashy, yet shallow *FIFA*. While Konami has become a little too comfortable with an aging squad of consistent, familiar players, EA has strengthened its squad with a handful of new features. This could be closer than we thought...

THE RESULT...

The underdog *FIFA* puts up a brave fight against much favoured opposition. Hitting a couple of solid jabs in the beginning with its licensed teams and superior graphics, and a couple of haymakers towards the end, with its added features for *FIFA 08*, but *Pro Evo* eventually wins on points, due to its consistent technical brilliance.

Pro Evo wins via points decision.

GAMES VS TV

Can the hard men of games keep up with the toughest dudes on TV? Let's find out...



Solid Snake vs. Snake Pliskin

No brainer, even 'Old Snake' could take this dude out in seconds. But to be fair, Kurt Russell has had to deal with Goldie Hawn for over 20 years: he must have some stamina...

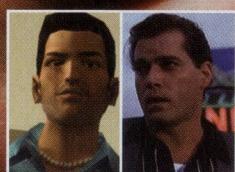
Winner: Solid Snake



Gabe Logan vs. Jack Bauer

We love games – believe it – but even we know that lil' old Gabe is no match for the sheer might of Bauer. He shot Robocop's wife for God's sake! Bauer for President '08: or the terrorists win...

Winner: Jack Bauer



Tommy Vercetti vs. Henry Hill

Chalk this up as a win for videogames. Henry Hill is nothing but a dirty snitching little rat: Vercetti is a loyal, wise cracking, cold blooded killer. Plus he has the best Hawaiian shirt ever.

Winner: Tommy Vercetti



Tony Hawk vs. Tony Hawk

Videogame Tony Hawk can grind down a power line, do a triple kickflip, and Dark Jedi grind onto the gutter of 10 storey house. What can the real Tony Hawk do? A 720... whoop-de-doo...

Winner: Videogame Tony

WORDS: MARK SERRELS

RUMBLE

ROUND 2... FIGHT!

Rock Band vs. Guitar Hero III



PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

Guitar Hero has been a stellar performer for years now, but the doubters are beginning to have, um... doubts.

Has the series lost its legs? Game creator Harmonix has controversially switched sides and started managing innovative rookie *Rock Band*, and this game is looking like a real contender, with its drum peripheral rocking the spot. Let's get it on!

TALE OF THE TAPE

| ROCK BAND | GUITAR HERO III | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Rocks out with cock out? | Undoubtedly | |
| Stellar song list? | Looks good... Headbanging | |
| Rockin' new peripherals? | Oh sweet God yes | Not really... |

THE RESULT

Guitar Hero comes out swinging, but *Rock Band*'s defence is solid, and *GH* finds it difficult to work punches through the tight guard. *Rock Band* is clearly holding something back, playing rope-a-dope before BAMM! A clean uppercut to the chin has *Guitar Hero* seeing stars. The referee starts the slow count, and *GH* gets to its feet at 8, and the ref has a good look before stopping the bout. It's all over, the old man just doesn't have the stamina...

Rock Band wins after the referee stops the match.

ROUND 3... FIGHT!

Splinter Cell vs. Metal Gear Solid



PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

This one should be a classic: two grizzled veterans, mano a mano, in a fierce fight to the death. On the one hand you have *Splinter Cell* and Sam Fisher, a roughneck NSA agent who's seen it all and done it all. On the other we have *Metal Gear Solid* and a genetically engineered super soldier cloned from the genes of the best warrior the world has ever seen. Yep, this battle is serious, expect to see all various kinds of gadgetry, and insane close quarter combat.

Of course, Solid Snake and the *MGS* franchise is the undoubtedly favourite, but Sam's done it against the odds before, and many would argue that Snake would rather talk someone to death with constant rambling questions instead of fighting. We're withholding judgement for now...

TALE OF THE TAPE

| SPLINTER CELL | MGS | |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Super hard main character | Yes | |
| Stupidly awesome plot | No | |
| Awesome mulletfest? | Sadly, not quite | Only the best... |

THE RESULT

Stupidly, Snake begins the fight by hiding in a completely conspicuous cardboard box in the middle of the ring. With a bizarrely placed exclamation point over his head, Sam Fisher sees right through this pathetic disguise, rips the box from Snake and knees him in the face.

In a groggy daze, Snake clutches down on one knee and contacts Colonel Roy Campbell for some advice. After a two hour conversation everyone in the arena, including Fisher, have fallen unconscious in a stupor of boredom. Then Snake makes his move, sneaking up behind Sam, putting him in a deathly choke hold. Before long the ZZZZZs are floating above Fisher's head as a slightly sleepy referee raises Snake's hand in ultimate victory!



Kratos vs. Chuck Norris

Let's just pray this never happens. Because the world would spontaneously combust - really...

Winner: No-one wins... let's make sure this match up never occurs - for the sake of the kids...



Cloud vs. David Beckham

Handbags at dawn. Both would possibly stop fighting to swap make up and stylist tips. Big girly men... this is the most redundant match up in history.

Winner: L'Oréal's new range of male moisturisers

READY TO RUMBLE

ROUND 4... FIGHT! GOW vs DMC



TALE OF THE TAPE

| | GOW | DMC |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Endless acts of deicide? | Oh hell yes | Super yes |
| 'Old man' hair | Yes: weird grey hair | Yes: baldness |
| Annoying 'emo' nonsense? | Thankfully no | Sadly yes |

PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

Dante's 'emo' leanings may make him odds on favourite to get his lily ass kicked in this bout, but remember that this grey haired dynamo has taken down demons – big ass demons that turn into dragons and breathe fire. Put it this way: Dante is no joke. But Kratos has literally killed gods. He is a god. Not only that – he's the God of War. We reckon this one'll be over quickly.

THE RESULT

Kratos rocks up to the ring and without saying anything stabs the referee in the face, rips off his testicles with his bare hands and starts making a sandwich. At this point Dante hasn't even entered the ring, and Kratos is stomping around the ring hungry for (more) blood. Dante starts to slowly approach the ring, but after seeing the terrifying visage of Kratos parading in the square circle, Dante curls up into a fetal 'emo' ball and begins to gently weep. This one was over before it started.

ROUND 5... FIGHT! GTA vs. Driver



TALE OF THE TAPE

| | GTA | DRIVER |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Best game franchise? | A firm yes | Not really |
| Jammin' '70s theme | Not yet... | Aww yeah... |
| Struggles to match the original | Hell no, daddio | Yeah, kinda |

PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

On paper perhaps the biggest mismatch of all. *GTA* is an all-conquering mega franchise as *Driver* heads slowly into the vanishing point of gaming history. But it's easy to forget that *Driver* was pioneering the 3D crime genre while *GTA* was still in top-down 2D diapers. It's possible that the daddy of the crime genre could pull a surprise drive-by on the biggest, heaviest hitter of them all.

THE RESULT

Driver is a bit of a slugger, so it comes blazing, but *GTA* is all dancing feet, and out jabs *Driver* with its superior range and pugilistic skills. After two knockdowns in early rounds *Driver* has swelling around the eyes, and its legs are totally gone. At this stage *GTA* hasn't even broken sweat, and at the beginning of the 5th round *Driver* doesn't even get off the stool, throwing in the towel, a broken game. It's hard not to feel sorry as *GTA* celebrates in style: "I SHOOK UP THE WORLD!"

ROUND 6... FIGHT! Silent Hill vs. Res Evil



TALE OF THE TAPE

| | Silent Hill | Resident Evil |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Potential for pant fillage? | High | Nigh on inevitable |
| Terrifying bosses? | YES! | ALSO YES! |
| Super creepy | Y-y-yes... | Hmm, kinda |

PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

While both games are undoubtedly old hands at this 'scaring the crap out of gamers' business, *Resident Evil* has weathered time way more efficiently than *Silent Hill*, even managing to reinvent itself in recent times. *Silent Hill* has stayed strong however, and is still the same old slugger it always was. We just wonder if it can go the distance with its fresher, more innovative rival.

THE RESULT

Both these fighters start slowly, and kind of creepily. Each circles the other, and *Resident Evil* throws the first punch. *Silent Hill* reels at the blow, but fires a quick combination back, knocking its rival down to one knee.

After getting up, however, *Resident Evil* is a different fighter: quicker, more efficient. Before long *Silent Hill* is being completely outboxed, taking blows from all angles. One swift uppercut from *Resi* later, and *Silent Hill* is down for the count.

ROUND 7... FIGHT!

Virtua Fighter vs. Tekken vs. Soul Calibur (Triple Threat Match)



PRE MATCH ANALYSIS

Folks this one is going to be a slobberknocker and no mistake. In the one corner we have the innovator, *Virtua Fighter*, with its dazzling technical brilliance, slightly sub par graphics, and non-user friendly control mechanics AAAAAAAAAND in the OTHER corner we have *Tekken* which is also kinda good, but has a Panda as a legitimate character – not good. Finally we have *Soul Calibur*, the late comer to the 3D fighter party. Who will win? Really we have no earthly idea. Round 7... FIGHT!

THE RESULT

This one's going to get messy fellas. *Tekken* blasts out of the blocks and attempts to bear hug everyone; it all gets a bit messy, but it soon becomes apparent that its

TALE OF THE TAPE

| | VF | TEKKEN | SOUL CALIBUR |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Technical brilliance | Oh yes | Hmm... | Yes, mostly |
| Awesome characters | Nah | Yes, to the max | Only a little |
| Not a button basher? | Totally not | Haha – yes | No |

attacks have no real focus. One well timed punch combination from the technically brilliant *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* is out for the count.

Only then does *Soul Calibur* even stand up from its stool, looking menacing, while sporting a ridiculously enormous sword. Ooh, scary!

Fashionably late to the contest, *Soul Calibur* approaches the already weakened *Virtua Fighter* and runs the prodigious blade right through its exhausted rival franchise. *Virtua Fighter* sinks to the floor groaning, blood spouting in various directions, and kinda twitching a lot; *Soul Calibur* stands alone in victory.

Soul Calibur wins in a bloody knockout.

Then, at the after party, all the hot 3D fighter chicks get a little tipsy, and have a fight of their own. A pillow fight. In their tight fitting, skimpy pajamas. Probably...

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ONLINE

The latest PS3 Network news, online reviews, reader online section and more!

WHAT'S NEW?

The latest PlayStation Store goodies

Accessing overseas PlayStation Stores

It's important to know that you don't have to get by with just the downloads on the Australian PS Store. You can setup overseas profiles on your PS3 and simply sign in as them to access the extra content available on the US and Hong Kong stores. To do this simply set up a new profile and enter an American or Hong Kong address. This way when you access the store using this profile you will be taken to the overseas stores. What's also cool is that once you start a download from an overseas store, you can switch back to your main Australian profile, start playing a game, and it will continue to download the content you started with a different profile.



Aussie Store

There's a huge swag of demos to download this month, the best of which are *Sega Rally*, *SKATE* and *Stuntman: Ignition*. If you've got a lot of spare time and a hefty download limit you might also want to check out the demos of *Folklore*, *Jericho* and *Bladestorm*. The Oz store also sees a good deal of downloadable content but we can't help but feel it's a little over-priced. The worst offender is *Spider-Man 3* which attempts to charge \$9.95 for something that should be a free cheat (an unlockable Goblin Jnr character). The *MotorStorm* Revenge Weekend pack sports more value for money but \$9.95 still seems steep for one re-worked track, a couple of new vehicles and an Eliminator mode.



USA Store

Disappointingly, the USA Store only offers a handful of items not already available on our local store. The best of the bunch is the enjoyable *The Simpsons Game* demo, which gives you a taste of the Shadow of the Colossal Doughnut boss fight against Lard Lad. There's also unique demos for *NBA 08*, *NBA 2K8* and the retro-styled *Pixel Junk Racers*. You might want to take a look at the superior range of wallpapers, including *The Simpsons* and a stack of *LocoRoco* options. Lastly, you can browse through new trailers of *Metal Gear Online*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *The Eye of Judgement*.

GRAW 2

Keep on knocking but you can't come in...

GRAW 2 (please don't make us say the whole title, we have limited page space) is one of the best, most realistic and tense shooters to grace the PS3.

It, along with *Rainbow Six Vegas* and the latest *Splinter Cell*, these titles are possibly the best military combat games we're going to see until *COD4*, *Killzone 2* and *MGS4*.

R6 got a 9 – a score we stand by, even though *GRAW 2* (which got an 8) has slightly better graphics and amazing explosions. Why? The stupid online. Never in this reviewer's long(ish) life has a game been harder to log into.

First you're logged into the Ubisoft server. You might want to go make a cup of tea here. Then you might, if you're really lucky, stumble onto a game that's about to finish and you'll be in the next rotation...

... only to find some smart arse has made it one shot kills and you play for about eleven seconds. It's hard not to compare this to *Warhawk*. If a game is full in *Warhawk* move onto one of the many others.

It won't take long. In the week we tried to get online with *GRAW 2* we played maybe five, six games. The rest of the time the server dropped out, the game was full or we somehow ended up as bystanders rather than shooters. In a word: frustrating.

Having said that the games we did play were quite fun, just brief and all too fiddly to tee up. Play the single-player campaign in *GRAW 2* – it seriously rules – play *Warhawk* for multiplayer.

★★



Warhawk

OPS straps in and feels the Gs!

We're all well aware of just how awesome *Warhawk* is, so we won't go into too much gameplay detail other than to say that the different game modes provide plenty of variation in play.

To begin with, the first thing you want to do before playing is go into the server filters in the 'Join Game' menu, and set 'Region' to 'All', because with the default setting of 'My Region', the Australian ranked servers won't appear in your search query.

Now, the bad news is that of the local ranked servers (that you can earn ribbons and unlocks on), there's only five at the moment, and particularly during peak periods, they're either full or nearly so. Ordinarily, you'd be able to just host your own server, but *Warhawk*'s bandwidth test seemed to limit our hosted games to a paltry maximum of four players – a bit weak when other titles like *Resistance* are happy to let you set the limits with support for up to 40 players for a locally hosted game.

While the server issues can easily be sorted by



more infrastructure or a patch, there's one minor issue that can be attributed to the players. That is, barely anyone seems to be equipped with a headset for voice chat mid-combat. It's worth noting that you don't have to have a Bluetooth headset – almost any USB headset will suffice, but just remember to configure it on the Cross Media Bar under 'Accessories Settings' before play.

★★★

OPS READER SECTION

Get your game on with other OPS readers

AxleF – Resistance
BfFaLcOn_2007 – Resistance
bounti – MotorStorm
dJAmZz – Warhawk
Cam4v – Resistance
Cosgrove – Resistance
EBK – MotorStorm

foxyphandlma – Res
iriquois – Resistance
Jaz12 – Resistance
Jase619 – Resistance
Malifcan – MotorStorm
MrTerminator – Resistance
Phoenixavenger – Resistance

PSIress – Res
Shags666 – Res
sir_gazman – Resistance
Stinkfire – Resistance
tails-4 – Rainbow Six Vegas
turbo180 – Resistance
Vauto – Resistance

FYI
Please don't feel left out if we can't add you to our friends list because they max out at 50 and ours are often full.

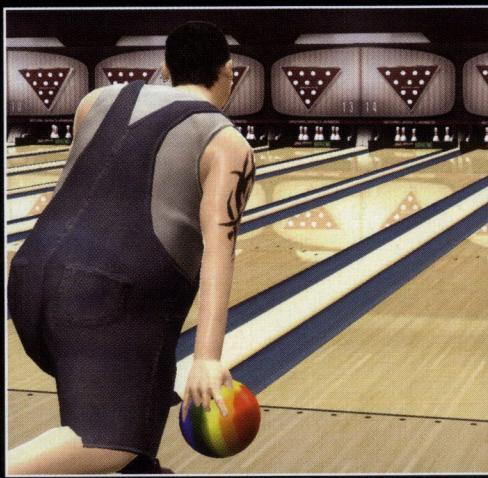
Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection

This is one of the crown jewels of the PlayStation Store, and it's now been re-released with an online features. With a high 1080p covering up for some of the suspect textures, this game could easily pass for a retail quality title. Well worth buying...



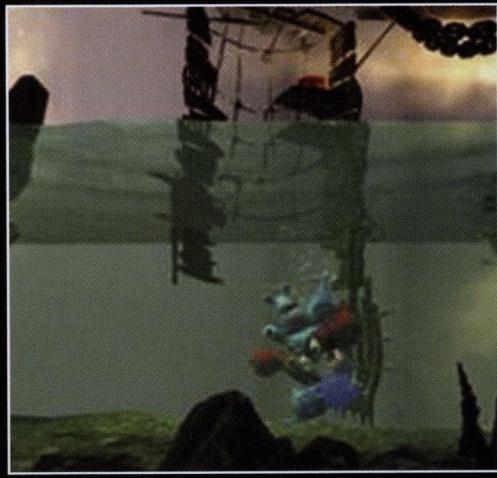
High Velocity Bowling

Protracted attempt to replicate bowling via motion-sensing. An insanely complicated control system renders this whole concept null and void. Unless they fix this title up before release, we would recommend you give *High Velocity* bowling a wide berth.



Operation Creature Feature

Utilising the new PlayStation Eye, this game is actually a lot of fun. Directing the little monsters into safety using hand gestures can get a little frustrating at times, due to inconsistencies, but it remains fun for the most part. Worth a gander upon release.



Pixel Junk Racers

If you were a fan of old school games like *Micro Machines*, then you are going to love this. A top down racer busting with insane challenges, this game is instant fun and so easy to pick up it's criminal. Use the **A** button to accelerate, and the D-pad to switch lanes. The speeds you can reach are off the chain and the learning curve is pitch perfect.



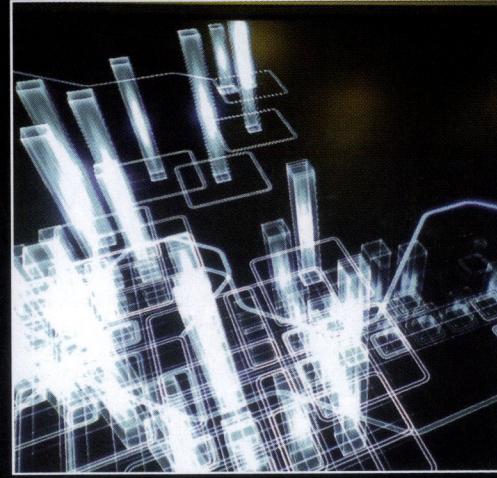
Tori Emaki

This game is, to be perfectly blunt, totally retarded. It's intended to be a relaxing jaunt through Japanese art via the PlayStation Eye, yet forces you to move around like an idiot and get frustrated by the inconsistent controls. It's hard to get a grip on what the hell is going on half the time, and you spend less time looking at the art than trying to get the whole thing to respond to your spasticated gestures. Yep, real relaxing, in a 'want to put your fist through the screen' kinda way.



Mesmerize

This is not a game, so think about that before you spend your hard earned dollars on it – it's more like an ambient musical journey, using the PlayStation Eye to control sound. So if you like to light candles, have herbal baths, and possibly chant while meditating, this is the game for you. The movements you make register on the PlayStation Eye, and are translated into ambient sound, combined with weird transforming images on screen. Whoah... trippy man.



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*Children under 15 must be accompanied by an adult.

THIS MONTH'S RELEASES PUT TO THE TEST

REVIEWS

Here at OPS we hit the games harder than anybody. There are no jaded elitists here – just a bunch of regular gamers blessed with the ability to successfully string a few words together and who tell it like it is. As a result, you can be assured that whether a game is great or garbage, we'll give you an honest verdict (and, hopefully, a chuckle in the process). We pride ourselves on opinions you can trust.

REVIEW RATINGS

01 Reserved for the very worst that developers have to offer.

Essentially, anything that receives this score has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. A game receiving this score could not possibly be any worse, unless it was broken from the outset (or gave you cancer, or killed your dog). A game that should never have even survived its first pitch – as bad as it gets.

02 A terrible, terrible game. There may be one or two

things about this game that work, or aren't actually broken, but they are so hopelessly outnumbered by the sheer quantity of badness that they basically cease to exist. Maybe it has a clever name, maybe the concept was sound – but virtually every single thing about it is bad beyond belief. Not worth the effort.

03 Very disappointing. A game with this score is

fundamentally flawed in a number of extremely vital ways. There may be one or two things that could've been done somewhat worse than they have been, but for most part it's totally uninspired, boring and unappealing in every way. There are games that are worse, but there's not that many.

04 Poor. There may be parts of this game that are vaguely fun, and it may be robust enough in a few departments, but the overall package is lacking any significant reason to stick it out.

Games receiving this score may show initial promise, or sound good at first, but will be unrefined, undercooked and let down by shoddy execution and poor attention to detail.

05 Mediocre. In the strictest terms, 50%

is a pass – just. Unfortunately, a game receiving this score will have had just as many things go wrong with it as go right, and that really isn't enough to succeed. A game receiving this score will probably be entertaining in parts without excelling anywhere, yet equally sub-par in others without being outright awful.

06 Decent enough, although still lacking a certain something. A game receiving this score will be sound, but will have some fairly glaring faults and your interest will probably wane pretty quickly. It will have a number of limitations that will probably turn off more than a few gamers, but will get just enough right to keep dedicated fans of the genre ploughing through.

07 Good. A robust, fun game that's well worth a look, although will only rarely amaze. A game receiving this score will have more or less accomplished nearly all it set out to do in a decent fashion, but it will have some noticeable problems that prevent it from being as good as it could be. Nevertheless, they generally won't ruin the overall gaming experience.

08 Great. A game receiving this score comes highly recommended. A combination of some odd issues, minor problems or a lack of innovation may hamper it somewhat, but the overall impression it leaves is very positive. Very entertaining, very satisfying and you wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to others. Well ahead of the pack in most departments.

09 Excellent. Outstanding in almost every way. Some negligible blemishes will just keep it from being held aloft as a true masterpiece, but it is very likely the best in its field. Most elements of this game will be truly remarkable and you'll be hard-pressed to find too many other games of greater quality. An astonishing game that leaves all but the very best behind.

10 Incredible. Everything went right during the creation of this game. A game receiving a perfect 10 does not necessarily mean it is perfect, likely just teasingly close, but to reserve 10s for THE perfect game is pointless. Instead, a 10 represents a game of gobsmacking brilliance, a game that stands high above the rest and a game that you cannot afford to ignore. A masterpiece.

THE OPS AWARDS



The Gold Award
is a rare gem and only to be given to games that score that magic 10/10. This score indicates gaming of simply incredible quality!



The Silver Award
is for games that receive 9/10. If you see this, it's a sign of star quality, indicating that you should buy this game now!



The Bronze Award
is for games that score 8/10. These games are highly recommended and are 100% guaranteed to satisfy.

OPS REVIEW SETUP



We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Bravia X-series for the best picture possible. This sucker melts eyeballs...

INSIDE...

PS3



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Who dares wins! – page 76

- Ratchet & Clank Future: ToD p82
- Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock p88
- Tony Hawk's Proving Ground p92

PS2



SPIDER-MAN: FRIEND OR FOE

Well, go on. Which is it? – page 104

- The Legend of Spyro: The Eternal Night p106
- Jackass: The Game p107
- MotoGP 07 p107

PSP



PURSUIT FORCE: EXTREME JUSTICE

Justice isn't blind – it's pissed – page 112

- Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron p114
- Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles p116
- Dead Head Fred p117

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
■ **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 2007
■ **DEVELOPER:** INFINITY WARD
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION

■ **PLAYERS:** 1-16
■ **PRICE:** \$119.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.charlieoscardelta.com

■ **BACK STORY:** After kicking off as an acclaimed PC shooter *Call of Duty* was soon adapted to PS2. *COD2: Big Red One* and *COD3* were both decent PlayStation shooters but failed to re-capture the original brilliance as they weren't based directly on Infinity Ward's true *COD* games.

■ "This is NOT a drill! I repeat NOT a drill!
Nah, I'm only kidding, it's a drill!"



■ "Go ahead, make my... baby!" The Terrorists' Handbook chapter on pick-up lines still needed some work...



CALL OF DUTY 4

Who knew WWIII would be this much fun?

PlayStation[®]
Official Magazine - Australia
GOLD AWARD
10/10

Remember back in the '80s when we were convinced World War III would break out at any second between America and Russia? The Russkies may have lost their arm wrestle with the Yanks for superpower supremacy but despite the Cold War's peaceful thaw Russia's still sitting on a serious stockpile of nukes and *Call of Duty 4* takes this nuclear arsenal and weaves it into an explosive WWIII scenario set during present day.

A fictional Middle Eastern General has purchased a bunch of dirty Russian nukes, executed his President on live TV for being too pro-American and now plans to wage nuclear war against the West. The plot may owe a lot to the very similarly themed flicks *The Peacemaker* and *True Lies*, and the terrorist stereotypes may be just as exaggerated as they were in those movies, but who really cares? The last thing you want is believable terrorists you can identify

with when the whole point is to have truckloads of fun blowing them into tiny pieces. And it is SO much fun.

BASIC TRAINING

Trying to figure out exactly what the overriding reason is that makes *Call of Duty 4* the best shooter yet wasn't easy but we decided it has to be the sheer variety of totally different but equally compelling combat situations. Obviously you've got your typical warzone

scenarios, but you'll also be changing pace completely and raining death from above in an AC-130 Gunship, carrying wounded comrades to safety, taking out targets from kilometres away with high-powered sniper rifles, using special camouflage suits to sneak by within inches of passing patrols, laser-painting targets for airstrikes, doing sneaky night-vision antics and tonnes of other cool as hell modern day warfare strategies. After spending half a decade making

■ Welding in the midst of war: retarded or necessary? You decide



■ Die! Clichéd terrorist man!



WWII games the team at Infinity Ward was clearly busting to get stuck into all sorts of exciting gameplay that just wasn't possible within the 1940s setting of its previous games.

Before we delve too deeply into COD4's combat and why it's so amazing we should probably look back at how the game itself introduces you to the action. COD4 opens in a British S.A.S. training facility. Within seconds your eyeballs are assaulted with an orgy of activity. The fields around you are filled with choppers dropping off and picking up troops, squads of recruits are running through basic training courses and various military vehicles are stationed around the kilometres of stunningly detailed terrain stretching off into the distance.

With a view like this it's easy to get

distracted but we've got a world to save so we decide to head to the nearby hangar for our own training. Instead of the usual 'shoot a few cans off a fence and crawl under barbed wire' training seen in previous war games COD4 drops you into an S.A.S. Killhouse – a specific training regime using live fire that focuses on taking down targets quickly and efficiently within urban locations.

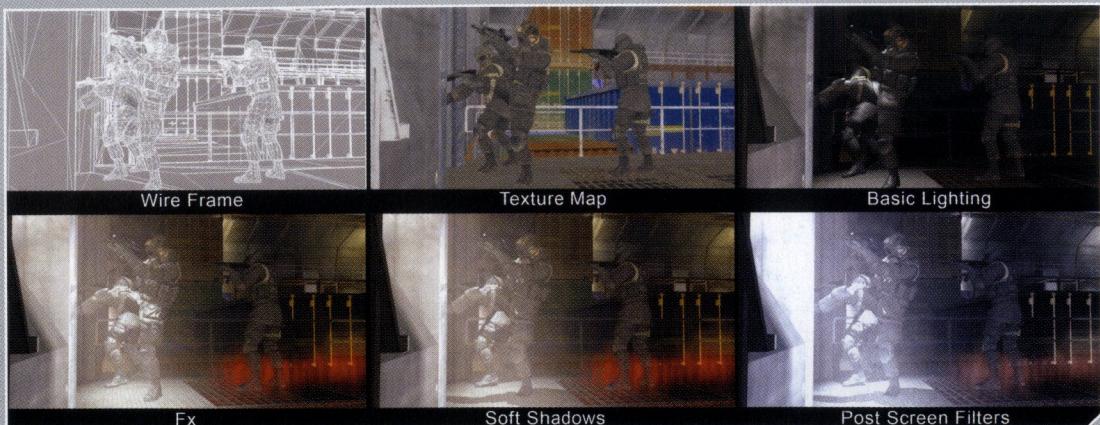
The first thing we do is climb to the top of a tall platform above the Killhouse (a series of rooms and corridors, broken up into numbered sections and filled with prop furniture and pop-up plastic targets). From the platform we fast-rope down into the first room to simulate a speedy insertion from a hovering chopper. The second our feet touch the ground our commander is barking orders into our

■ Die! Clichéd old beard man!



APOCALYPSE WOW!

We won't go on about the graphics too much, mostly because you should be able to tell from the screenshots that this game packs some serious eye candy. As you can see, a startling amount of detail has gone into creating COD4's characters but this is merely typical of the staggering quality of the visuals. Whether it's the cloud of sand the chopper's rotors are kicking up or the gently spiralling smoke trail left by the rocket that's just hammered into a car and sent flaming debris all over the screen, you'll see painstaking attention to detail in every element you look at.



■ The Amstrad version of COD4 never made the grade...

headset like, "Take out the targets in room two, then flashbang the third room and eliminate everything inside." Even though the proper missions haven't even started yet, as we jog around the course, flicking out grenades, destroying targets with short, controlled bursts from our sub-machine gun, then switching instantly to our pistol (because reloading is too slow) we begin to feel like a seriously bad ass, best-of-the-best, elite super soldier.

After a couple of attempts we manage to clock in a respectable course time of 50 seconds but as we smugly approach the commander, heads swimming with delusions of bad ass grandeur, our egos are instantly put in check as we're asked if we want to beat the course record of 18 seconds. We decline, partly because we've got a review to write and are on a tight timetable, but mostly because it sounded frickin' impossible and we're actually pussies (don't tell our chicks). COD4 is packed with extra little challenges, secrets, and replayability at every turn (see PLAY IT AGAIN SAM).

THE SPICE OF LIFE

Anyway... getting back to COD4's huge variety of action, one of the early levels is a stealthy night mission where we're trying to extract an informant being held in a

terrorist camp. After eliminating a couple of patrolling terrorists with our silenced sniper rifle we begin to get a feel for this new stealthy caper. Our next challenge is a couple of terrorists inside a nearby building. Our first instinct was to pull out our pistol and run in guns blazing but at the urging of one of our AI teammates we opt instead to covertly place a claymore mine (the ones with the motion detectors) outside the doorway. Now that the trap is set we fire a few bullets into the wall to get their attention, then watch them run out to investigate, only to both get blown to bits by the claymore. Genius.

With the outpost taken care of it's time to move on to the main camp. We're in position up on a ridge high above the camp where we can give covering fire to a second team waiting to attack the camp on foot. The main problem for the ground team is a couple of enemies behind mounted machine guns. A well-placed shot from our sniper rifle eliminates the first gunner (complete with authentic blood splatter on the wall behind him). However, no matter where we move on the ridge we just can't seem to get a clean shot at the second gunner. That's when we get another handy hint from one of our teammates about the calibre and power of the sniper rifle we're using. We line up the shot on the second



gunner, pull the trigger and fire the bullet THROUGH THE FREAKIN' WALL! We love this game.

The ground team is now free to rush in and mop up the rest of the resistance, so we move on to the building that our intel reports tell us is the location of the informant. One of our teammates runs around the back of the building and kills the power at the same moment another blasts the front door's lock then kicks it open. We pull on our nightvision goggles, rush into the house and let our S.A.S. Killhouse training take over. We move from room to room methodically, encountering bewildered terrorists stumbling about in the dark, feeling

around with their arms outstretched and put their lights out permanently with a muffled tat-tat from our silenced pistol.

THIS IS THE COOLEST GAME EVER!

We know. The crazy thing is that the stuff we've described above happens in the second level. There's a whole bunch of far better sniper missions later in the game that we're dying to tell you about but we don't want to spoil anything. Well... okay, so there's one mission where you're wearing a ghillie suit (a super camouflaged outfit, all covered in leaves and twigs) that lets you crawl around in the grass right under the noses of your enemies and do



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PG

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PLAYSTATION® 3

all sorts of insanely sneaky stuff that we're not going to tell you about... but we will spill what happens if you botch a kill and get spotted. When the alarm's raised, as well as machine gun-packing thugs you also get trained attack dogs charging at you. If you're fast enough (like us) when the dogs jump up you can hit the melee button to catch their heads and snap their neck. All right... so we had our jugulars ripped out the first few times but we did pull off the cool neck-snap on our third (er... fourth) try.

We know we said we wouldn't but we've also got to give you a tiny hint about another sniper mission where you're using this super high-powered rifle to take out a target kilometres away. Let's just say that with the sort of calibre this rifle packs, your target is more tomato sauce than man after the bullet hits him.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

We realise it sounds like we're giving away the best bits but trust us when we say these highlights are only scratching the surface of *COD4*'s incredible wealth of combat. We weren't kidding when we said it's the best shooter we've ever played. We couldn't close out the review though without telling you a bit about one of most amazing levels in the game.

There's a squad of friendly marines on the ground, marked helpfully with

flashing lights on their helmets, which you can make out from your AC-130 Spectre Gunship flying hundreds of metres above the action. The AC-130 is a hollowed-out cargo plane filled with some seriously nuts firepower. Your mission is to switch between the AC-130's 24, 40 and 105mm guns and make a big mess of anything that doesn't have a flashing light on its head.

The 24mm gun is a formidable chain gun that tears up the ground and is perfect for taking out targets that are on the run. If you want a little more firepower for vehicles or groups of enemies you can flick to the 40mm gun which packs grenade-sized explosions with each round. The 105mm shells may take a second or two longer to hit their targets but you don't need to worry much about accuracy with this sucker since it unleashes building-leveling explosions that send enemy corpses cartwheeling 50 metres through the air.

As well as being a blast to play, the AC-130 sequence feels completely authentic. Everything from the artillery sound effects to the realistic nightvision-enhanced view of the battlefield feels just right. The atmosphere is also helped a lot by the comm chatter coming from your fellow marines. While you're doing the shooting you'll hear comments like "You are cleared to engage", "That's a hit",

"Good kill. I'm seeing lots of little pieces down there" and "This is going to make one hell of a highlights reel."

THE A-TEAM

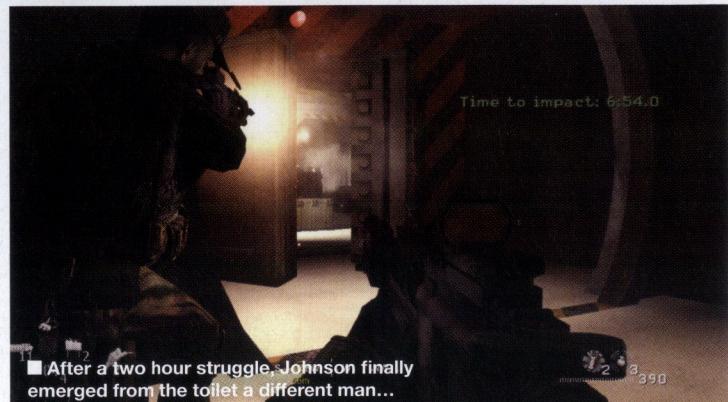
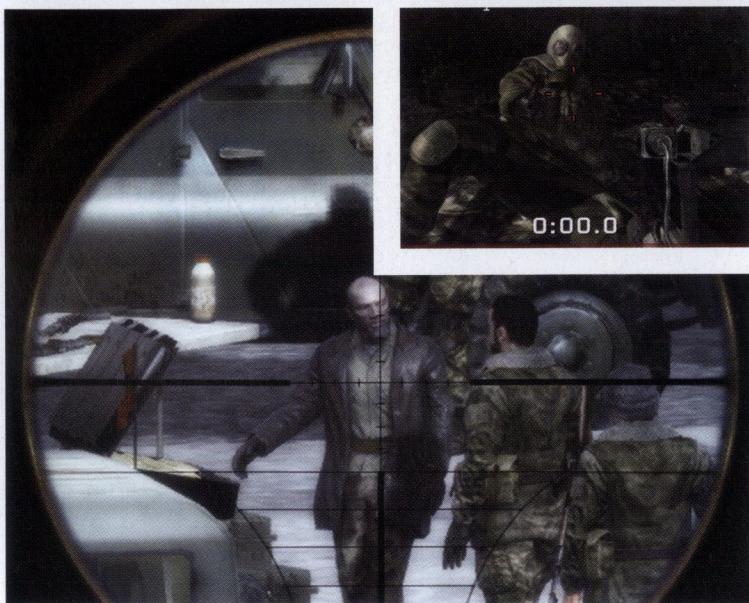
More than any game before it *COD4* succeeds in making you feel a part of a living, breathing team. Rather than simply standing around firing ineffectually at the enemy while you kill everyone, your teammates in *COD4* walk, talk and, most importantly, kill just like a well-trained military unit. Your buddies will rush to cover, lean out, suppress the enemy, kick in doors for you and constantly call out their actions and other useful info. Expect to hear about it when they need cover because they're "reloading", when they've spotted enemies "over by the broken wall" or when you need to "grab that Hammer missile and take out the bloody tank!"

After two watered down PC ports and Treyarch's recent placeholder sequel, we can finally enjoy a true COD game developed for PS3 by Infinity Ward. PlayStation owners couldn't ask for a better entry into the legendary series either. After focusing on WWII in the first games Infinity Ward has thoroughly researched modern warfare to ensure you experience a dizzying variety of combat scenarios taking advantage of bleeding-edge military tech. The first true next generation shooter has arrived! **■ Narayan Pattison**

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM



Call of Duty 4 is jam-packed with bonus modes to ensure you're entertained for months. The biggest lifespan booster has to be the multiplayer mode. We've yet to play it online (check back soon for our online review) but we've had a good thrash about with *COD4*'s multiplayer over a LAN and came away mighty impressed. As well as all the options you'd expect players can unleash awesome in-game rewards for performing killing sprees, including calling in airstrikes and fire support from hovering gunships. On top of this each player chooses a class (like Assault or Sniper) and then customises their character with specific Perks, like bullets that can blast through walls, being able to drop grenades as you die and scores of others. There's even a cool kill-cam replay that shows your death from your killer's perspective so that there are never any "how the hell did I get killed" complaints. As well as the fantastic multiplayer (which is sure to give *Resistance* strong competition for PS3's best online mode) there are plenty of extras to keep you coming back to the single-player mode. Intel laptops are hidden around each level which can be collected to unlock some very cool cheats and there's even a whole new single-player game called Arcade that's opened up after completing the main game. In Arcade mode (pictured) all of your actions are scored and you only have three lives per level.



PROS:

- Variety of intense combat
- Great multiplayer

CONS:

- PS3s are expensive...
- Too many for girly boys...

VERDICT:

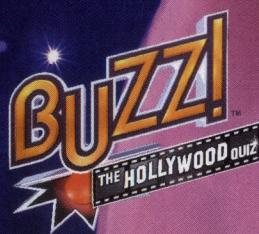
Relentlessly exciting. You'd have to be insane to miss this!

OFFICIAL SCORE:
10



PlayStation® 2

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PG

Mild
violence

Make it big in Hollywood

"...And I want to thank my mother for letting me stay up late and watch my favourite Hollywood movies as a kid, so I could recognise the clips. And my fellow contestants, all 7 of you, for playing the game with me. Thank you my living room, the place where it all happened. My cat for spiritual strength. And finally Brad and Leonardo and Johnny, I wouldn't have been able to answer the 5000 questions without you."

Get your party started with Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz.
Also available, Buzz! The Music Quiz, Buzz!
The Sports Quiz and Buzz! The Mega Quiz.
BuzzTheGame.com



■ **GENRE:** ACTION/PLATFORMER
■ **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 2007
■ **DEVELOPER:** INSOMNIAC
■ **DISTRIBUTOR:** SONY

■ **PLAYERS:** 1
■ **PRICE:** \$109.95
■ **HD:** 720p
■ **WEB:** www.ratchetandclank.com

■ **BACK STORY:** Perhaps PlayStation's most beloved heroic duo are Ratchet and Clank, the furry wee Lombax and his even littler robot juxtapose nicely with the crazily destructive weaponry they can wield. But after numerous titles – will the pair manage to bring the goods to the PS3?

INFO BYTE

What's nice about *ToD* is there's the main plot, a subplot about space pirates, another subplot about Ratchet's origins, another subplot about a smuggler, another one with these robots and this hot chick... oh look. It's a game that's full of story goodness that never tells a tale at the expense of something blowing up real pretty-like.



■ "Ratchet... do you think we could ever be 'more' than friends?" "No! Stop asking!"

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

The BIG GUNS of platforming take on their first PS3 adventure

Ebony and Ivory, Mork and Mindy, Tango and Cash, '80s movies and upbeat, zany montages, beer and red bull benders, running around with your underpants on your head... and Ratchet and his robotic chum Clank.

These are things that have gone together since time immemorial. Well,

except for the undies on the head thing – that was more since time... last Friday-morial. Long story. Probably best left alone, actually.

WHAT IS THE SILLY MAN SAYING?

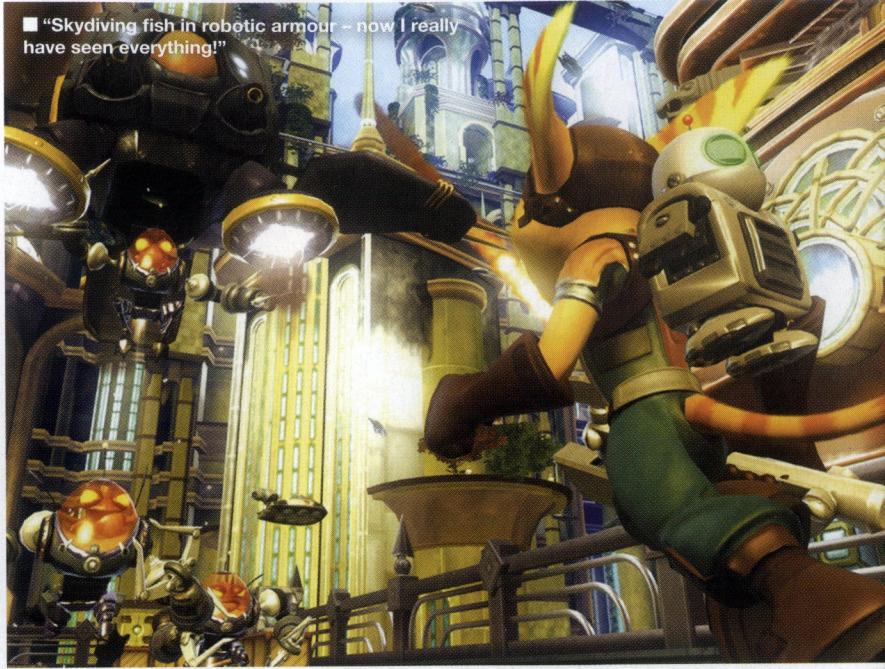
Readers, meet *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* for the PS3. For

those in the cheap seats it's the latest adventure of possibly PlayStation's most popular platforming duo. Matched perhaps only by Jak and Daxter: although Jak's all "emo" these days, Daxter's still good for a drink and a giggle – check out his adventure on the PSP, you'll thank us.

Anyhoot – Ratchet and Clank have

been together, "just friends" mind you, since 2002. Their first PS2 outing was quite the beller. Sort of in friendly(ish) competition with the *Jak & Daxter* series – Jak went the platforming route whereas *Ratchet & Clank* added a little firepower to their 'jump over the





spinning thing onto the other floating platform' deal.

This was divisive to the fans and absolute gold to the creators of both series'. After all you were either a *Jak* fan or a *Ratchet* acolyte, few strayed into the 'playing both games' camp. And those guys all um, turned into zombie werewolves. With syphilis. Yeah, and then they exploded. [No. No they didn't, Anthony - Ed]

CAN'T SLEEP? PROBABLY THE SOUND OF STUFF EXPLODING...

For anyone familiar with Insomniac games' barnstorming, gut-busting, record-breaking, thunderball of awesomeness - *Resistance: Fall of Man*, you might be interested to learn the imaginative, and cruelly destructive, weapons of that game are direct descendants from *R&C*. See Insomniac also created the furball and talking toaster duo.

Impressive range of genres, ja?

And rather than just have a series of levels (or planets in this case) to jump

around and find the "magic gem" they imbued the platform genre with something new: big funken firepower. Something no one had really done to any great extent at that point.

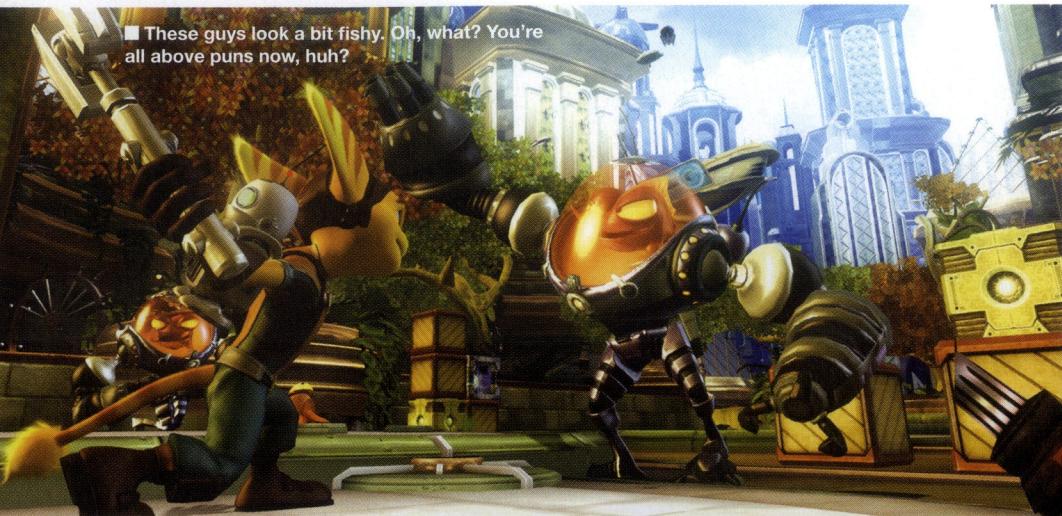
The game sold like gangbusters

- even getting a Japanese release, a rare treat indeed for a western developed game (although allegedly *Ratchet*'s eyes were made wider and more "anime-like". We wonder if Clank was put in a pleated skirt and made to giggle like a Japanese schoolgirl... some of us hope so).

A sequel was inevitable. Cue *Ratchet & Clank 2: Locked & Loaded* - also known in some territories as *R&C: Going Commando* - beginning the delightful tradition of putting double entendres in the titles: in this case, slang for getting about without man panties or lady delicacies. We've all been there.

Apart from the rather silly title, *R&C 2* was an major improvement on the previous games and seemed to somehow cement the template later games would emulate and try to improve upon.





BEWARE THE GOLDFISH MECHS OF DOOM!

Yeah, they look tough now - but whip around with something that goes bang and all that'll be left are the little fish heads that float around in the bubble-like helmets of these frequent foes. Best you crush them with your wrench. What? It's the kind thing to do... also very funny.



This time you could 'big up' your weapons, pimp your space ship and strafe your opponents. It doesn't sound like much - but the platforming genre is normally as shallow as the urine and chlorine cocktail that is the infants' pool at the public baths.

Another hit guaranteed another sequel, this time in the dual-named

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal or just *R&C 3* in countries where people are simple and dull-witted. You know, like England.

Then the series took a bit of a leftfield turn with *Ratchet: Gladiator* - with Clank not playable and the emphasis on arena-like combat. It was a fine game but really it was like the pole without the stripper and the body glitter. A return to form in a new format was the recent *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters* on the PSP renewed interest but *Tools of Destruction* is what we're on about and you'd probably like to know about that, huh?

YEAH, THANKS FOR THE HISTORY LESSON - MAKE WITH THE REVIEW, FATTY

An impressive feature of the *Ratchet & Clank* games has been a mostly consistent mythos; one that gets added to with each game but never fully revealed. See Ratchet is a Lombax - as far as he knows the last Lombax in existence. Clank on the other hand was originally going to be an evil robot but fate weaved its twisted tapestry and voila: the stars are born.

So how does this solid, if rather familiar, formula translate on the mighty PS3? Short answer: very well, thanks Guv' nor. Long answer - the following...

WE'RE RATCHETING IT NEXT GEN NOW, BABY!

You're Ratchet, hanging with your tin chum Clank. You start off on a very *Star Wars* (the new ones, unfortunately) looking world when you receive a distress call from Captain Qwark - the cowardly mainstay of the series who is quick to take the credit for deeds he didn't do and even quicker to hide from a fight.

However it appears Qwarky's genuinely stumbled upon the plot of an evil-doer Emperor Percival Tachyon - a pint sized creature known as a Cragmite.

What this fellow lacks in size he more than makes up for in being a complete prick and soon the glittering, beautiful metropolis is suffering from a full scale invasion. Tachyon has at his disposal these rough-looking space goldfish. Seriously, they're like big mech dudes but once you blow up their body they are revealed to be bug-eyed reptilian types, gasping for air. They're lots of fun to splatter, FYI.

FEED US MORE OF THIS THING CALLED "PLOT"

Well, it turns out the invasion was actually a plot to get Ratchet. Confused? You will be until your ship enters the Polaris Galaxy and



■ "Argh! Get the slinkys offa me! Gerremoff!! Ahhh!!" (Ratchet hates slinkys...)

you chat with Talwyn who tells Ratchet about the "Lombax secret". Could Ratchet not be alone? Could his race still be alive somewhere? See this is an ongoing question and you'll actually be interested in the answers.

Tools of Destruction for Ratchet is kind of a journey to learn about the Lombax – and find out some rather disturbing home truths, involving a certain

little bastard Cragmite (we shall say no more). While all this is going on and Ratchet and Clank have to explore an impressive range of varied planets, fighting beasts, getting weapons, upgrading them and getting yet more weapons (seriously, there are so many weapons and gadgets in this game it verges on the insane) Clank has a little secret too.

His subplot involves the rather startling discovery that he has a soul! He can also speak to really cool looking robots only he can see called Zony [ahem], who unlock powers Clank never knew he had – levitation,

telekinesis to name but two. With all this story just cluttering up the joint you might be forgiven for thinking *Tools of Destruction* (or *ToD*) is all mouth and no trousers. Let us – the Official PlayStation crew – assure you *ToD* has plenty of trousers. It's a veritable trouserama.

GREAT, SO THE EXPLOSIONS ARE... WHERE NOW?

ToD knows not to reinvent the wheel. We all love *Ratchet and Clank*. You're not suddenly, say, playing a butterfly in the new *LocoRoco* game (what the hell is up with that by the way? Lame!). It's business as usual. Each planet has a main goal and some have optional side quests. There are various ways to tackle said challenges – usually with the prodigious use of jumpy jumpy combined with heavy ordinance.

WE'LL NEED GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS...

You want weapons? How's this little lot sound: Pyro Blaster, Combustor, Predator Launcher, Negotiator (ironically named, as the only thing you'll be negotiating is 'will your foe splinter into one million tiny pieces or two million?'), Alpha Distributor, Buzz Blades, Plasma Beasts, Tornado Launcher (one of the many SIXAXIS controlled weapons) and Fusion Grenades. There are around 20 weapons,

all of which are upgradeable and, in a very clever wrinkle, the more you use a certain weapon the more powerful it gets. But it's not all about blowing stuff up. Yes, it's mostly about blowing stuff up – but there's also a bunch of gadgets and whatnot you'll be needing.

Gang of pirate robots about to make you walk the virtual plank – slip into your holographic pirate disguise! Seriously. Then you have to dance a pirate jig, "shaking your booty" with a flick of the old SIXAXIS controller.

There's also the Gravity Boots for when walking up walls is the thing to do, Grind Boots make a welcome return, especially in one planet where a massive evil robot is smashing apart the very rails you're grinding, the Gelanator which squirts out bouncy, gelatine-like platforms to jump to higher heights or even chuck in the water and ride as rafts. There's the Visi-Copter which you can SIXAXIS up to unwar enemies and, you know, explode and another robot pal called Mr. Zurkon who, well, lives to kill. Bit of advice: when you get this fellow – upgrade him. He's an essential distraction when you're fighting off the bastard hordes. There's also a nano sprinkler that will fire highly destructive nanobots at whatever you've chucked it near and, an office fave, the funkalous Groovitron.

SIDE MISSIONY GOODNESS

That rather nasty, toothy beastie that's bearing down on our heroes isn't actually part of the main game, per se. He's part of a species of which you can harvest their souls (providing they don't, you know, eat you!) and exchange them for bolts and money with a shonky smuggler. Hooray for dodgy deals!



Chuck this colourful disco orb into a gang of unsuspecting foes and they will literally be unable to stop dancing. We guess it's true – you can't stop the music. Nobody can stop the music. Although slashing the jiggling foes with a laser whip, splattering them with some Buzz Blades or pumping the area full of grenades seemed to do the trick – go figure.

WHOAH, BUT HOW DOES SHE ACTUALLY PLAY?

This game is tight. Really tight. Platform games can be notoriously frustrating if the camera's a tad wonky or the collision detection a smidge dodgy, happily none of these crimes against game-manity feature here. What we do get are some cool new modes of play. Ratchet can now launch himself off these green triangle... things and go spinning through the air. He can use a transporter and shoot his atoms across floating islands. Space battles still feature (although not quite as heavily as some previous entries) and some planets have you freefalling to get through defences (again the SIXAXIS comes into play, although you have the option of turning it off if that's not your cup of tea). There are also mini-games with Clank and the mysterious Zony, hacking mini-games to be specific, which, well, are a bit frustrating.

The basic gameplay is a thing of beauty. Double jump (Clank's propellers will allow you to glide great distances), get a better aim for precision shooting, leap across cavernous gaps, soar using Ratchet's wings through some really tense SIXAXIS controlled mayhem and drink in the graphics. They're not *Heavenly Sword* beautiful but they're perfect for the subject matter. Colourful, cartoony and completely chockers with destructible objects and environments.

WILL I BE THERE FOR A LONG TIME, OR A GOOD TIME?

Both, actually. You could rush through the game in 10 hours (and you would be rushing) because there are many side quests, hidden missions and super, special,

secret weapons to find. Plus once you finish the game you can start all over again... but with all the weapons, gadgets and devices you had before. However, the game's difficulty level will rise accordingly. Still, it's a nice touch and a change from games that end, have a credit sequence and sort of go: "Righto, mate, you can piss off now." (Clive Barker's *Jericho* we're looking right at you, baby!)

SO, ARE THERE CONS TO THIS GAME'S MANY PROS?

To be honest we did expect... a little bit more. It's just that with a new system – the PS3 – they could have really pushed the graphical power... and while it looks good, even great, it should look amazing. Why doesn't the sun gleam off Clank's wee metal body? Why doesn't Ratchet's fur ruffle in the breeze? These are good, solid graphics, and the models are interesting, original and sometimes a little spooky – but they're never going to take your breath away. Playing *ToD* is a consistently enjoyable experience, during which you'll probably smile and even have a chuckle at a clever bit – but it's just *Ratchet & Clank* polished up and wearing a prettier dress.

SO SHOULD I BUY THIS BAD BOY OR NOT, DAMN IT!?

We have no trouble recommending that platform fans, especially *Ratchet & Clank* aficionados, fork out the coin

for this game. Quite simply it's the biggest, wildest, most interesting, varied and downright good ol' fashioned fun adventure these two have been part of – no small claim, we can tell you. However, those of you who prefer their gaming action from a first-person perspective or don't really like the odd mix of cute, shoot and pathos the series somehow captures then perhaps a rental is in order.

To be quite frank we were a little underwhelmed when we first started playing. It just felt like *Ratchet & Clank* on the PS3 – and to an extent that's all it is. But it's bigger, nastier weapons-wise, deeper and much more intriguing than ever before.

Not wanting to give too much away but one of the sub plots ends on a cliff hanger and we're bloody dying to know what happens next. The fact that a series of at least six games (not including a second PSP entry on the way) has been improving with each and every entry is hugely impressive.

Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction is the best in the series by quite a large margin. Oh sure, people are going to bitch about the lack of some of the previous mini-games (no giant Clank fights, sorry!) but ultimately this is a slick platformer/shooter hybrid that never gets boring and could be put in a lot worse places than your PlayStation 3. You gotta love the *Ratchet & Clank*, we certainly do.

■ **Anthony O'Connor**

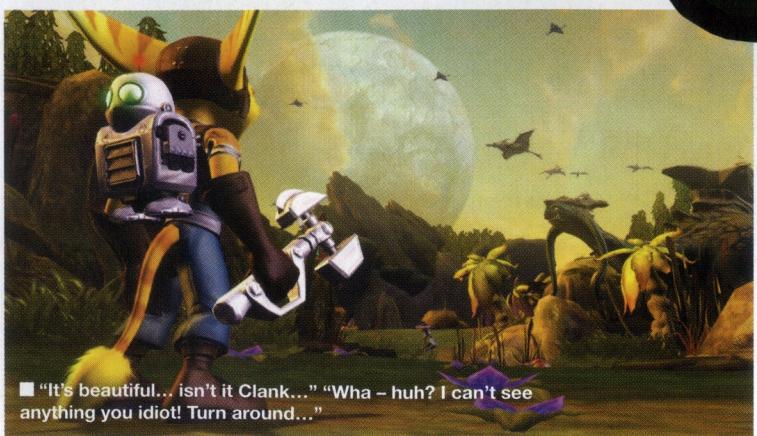
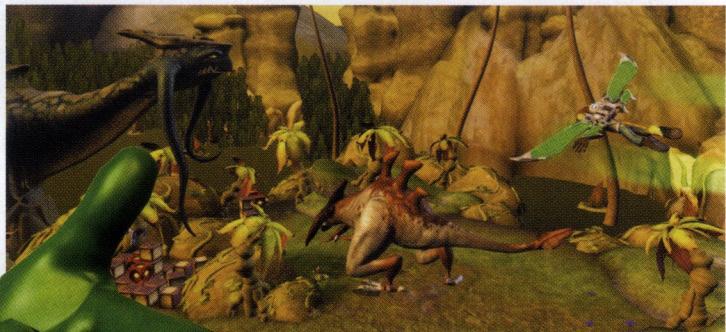
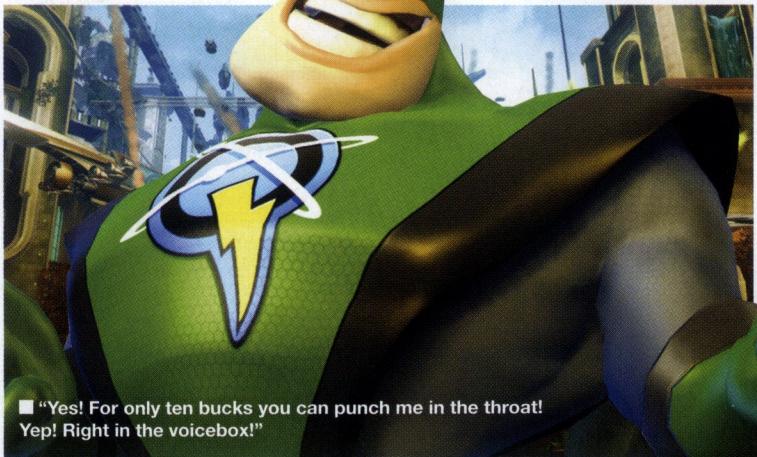
IF YOU CAN'T FIND IT, GRIND IT!



Yes, the Grind Boots are back and you'll be dodging, ducking and flipping over obstacles as the game will throw sometimes insane amounts of crap to stop you. It's strange, although occasionally tricky, these sections never really get frustrating. The same can be said for most of the game really (apart from the tedious hacking sections... argh!)



"Quite simply it's the biggest, wildest, most interesting, varied and downright good ol' fashioned fun adventure these two have been part of..."



| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| PROS: | CONS: |
| ■ Consistently enjoyable | ■ It's not mind-blowing |
| ■ Crazy foes and weapons! | ■ Frustrating cliff hanger... |

VERDICT:

Ratchet and Clank's best adventure to date. Undoubtedly...

OFFICIAL SCORE:
08

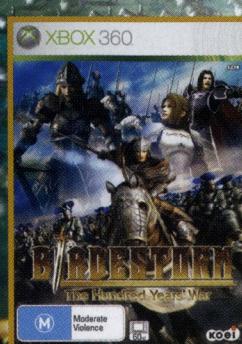
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The Hundred Years' War

AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 2007



Moderate
violence



PLAYSTATION 3



Produced by
W-Force

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■ GENRE: ROCK-GOD SIMULATOR
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$169.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.guitarhero.com

■ BACK STORY: The third proper chapter of the *Guitar Hero* series (the fourth counting the patchy *Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s*), *Guitar Hero III* is the first developed for Activision by *Tony Hawk* creators Neversoft. The original GH gurus at Harmonix are now building *Rock Band* for MTV and EA.

GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

"Here I am – rock you like a hurricane!"

Has Neversoft done it? Has it managed to churn out a suitable sequel to Harmonix's genre-creating, finger-melting and all-conquering *Guitar Hero* series?

The short answer, for those who have important business to attend to and need to be elsewhere, is yes. Neversoft has crafted a worthy successor to *GHII* in *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*.

Put simply, if you like *Guitar Hero* you won't be disappointed with *GHIII*.

Much.

"WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE, WE GOT FUN AND GAMES..."

Shipping with a wireless guitar controller more or less identical to the ones on PS2 (albeit shaped like a Les Paul with a removable neck and slightly more robust than the earlier models) the way you play the game hasn't changed. The aim remains the same, as it were, and

GHIII feels very much like an extension of a formula perfected in *GHII*. Hammer-ons and pulls-offs seem noticeably more forgiving but the note charts seem as legitimate and challenging as we're used to. The game itself has benefited greatly from a next gen spit and polish – the exaggerated characters and the guitars themselves are impressively detailed, the much-improved lip-synching of the lead singer is worth a mention and a few useful tweaks have been made to the HUD, including a handy ticker that keeps track of your note streaks.

"DARKNESS IMPRISONING ME. ALL THAT I SEE, ABSOLUTE HORROR..."

Now to the tracklist itself, which is always tricky territory. You can't just list all the songs you don't like and a bunch of songs you do like and propose that if the latter had been replaced with the former it

would have been perfect. Doing that, and that alone, is unconstructive and assumes everyone in the world likes what you like.

And they don't.

We will say the available tracks are, for the most part, well suited for their intended purpose – which is copious amounts of finger shredding and wrist demolishing rocking. We'd probably go as far as saying that it's the best setlist so far, striking a decent balance between classic rock, hard rock, glam rock, punk rock, funk rock, heavy metal, alternative rock, blues rock and a sprinkling of grunge. We haven't the space here for a dedicated list of all the goodness *GHIII* has to offer (check OPS #8 for a sizable chunk of the available songs), suffice to say there are some absolute belters. 'Welcome to the Jungle', 'Bulls on Parade', 'Even Flow', 'Suck My Kiss' and 'One' (Metallica, finally) are on high rotation in OPS Towers. We honestly could've done without

PlayStation.
SILVER AWARD
9/10



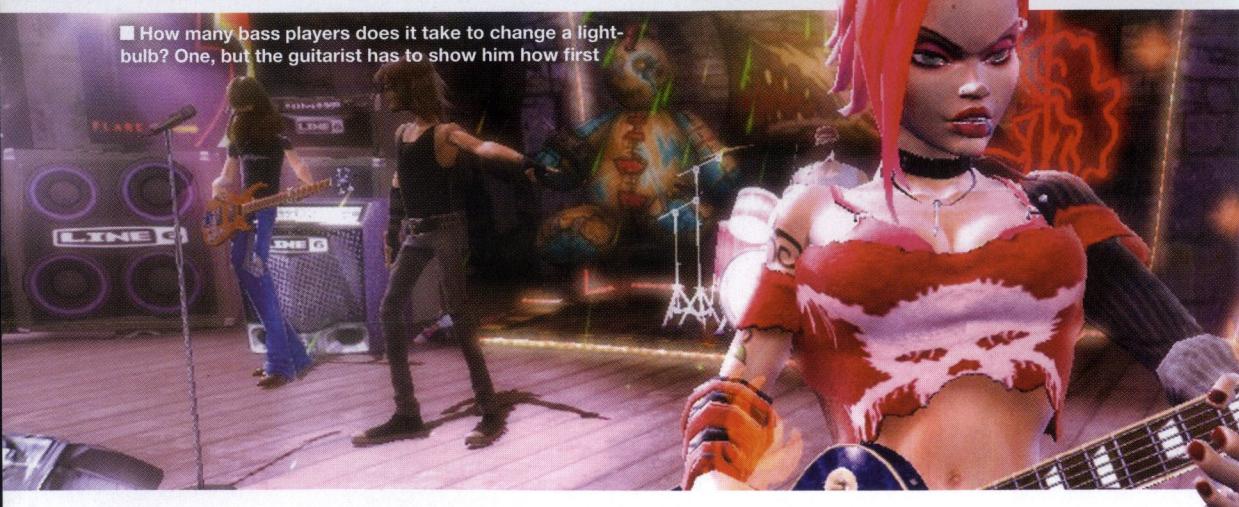
INFO BYTE

In addition to the real guitarists you can unlock and purchase to use as playable characters there are a few new faces including a spunky Japanese schoolgirl and the God of Rock.

■ Why is a drum machine better than a drummer? Because it can keep good time and won't sleep with your girlfriend



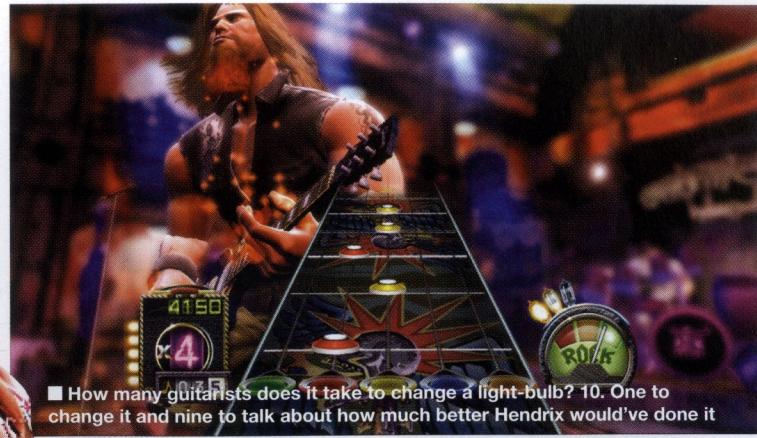
■ How many bass players does it take to change a light-bulb? One, but the guitarist has to show him how first



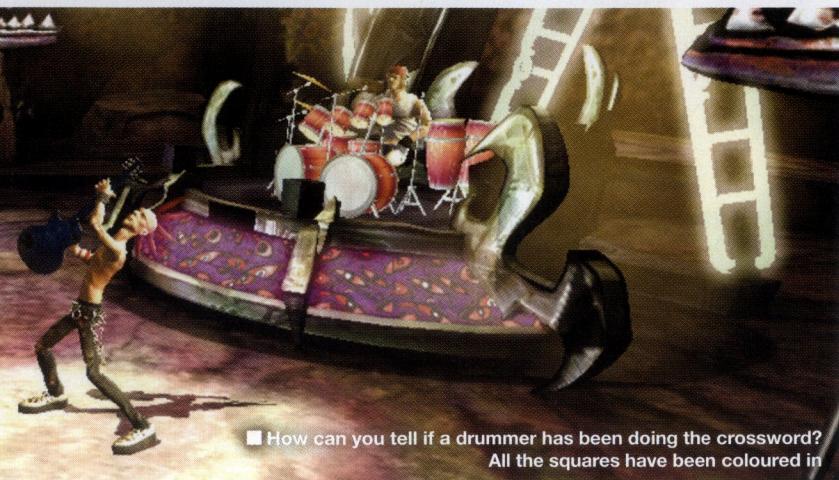
■ What's the difference between an extra large pizza and a guitarist? The pizza can feed a family of four



■ How many guitarists does it take to change a light-bulb? 10. One to change it and nine to talk about how much better Hendrix would've done it



■ How can you tell if a drummer has been doing the crossword?
All the squares have been coloured in



Santana's 'Black Magic Woman' (the game is called *Legends of Rock*, after all) and some Australian music wouldn't have gone astray, but it's mostly top-notch.

That said, it'd be remiss of us not to ask the questions no doubt on many a rocker's lips – questions that have haunted us since *Guitar Hero*'s inception.

AC/DC? No. Led Zeppelin? No.

For reasons presumably only known to Activision and Neversoft, these legends of rock are nowhere to be seen in *Legends of Rock* – and it is a disappointment. What makes it even more frustrating is that both of these bands have lent bitchin' tunes to Tinseltown but (apparently) can't be bought for *GHIII*. Sorry Zep, artistic integrity isn't a crutch when you kybosh a game that is a celebration of rock, yet

greenlight the use of 'Immigrant Song' in *Shrek the Third*.

However, *GHIII*'s biggest problem isn't the absence of AC/DC and Led Zeppelin. It's Battle Mode.

“YOU DRIVE US WILD, WE’LL DRIVE YOU CRAZY...”

“Why?” we hear you quiz.

Because it's shit. Plain and simple. There is no easier, and no more succinct, way to describe it. We just don't like it.

In fact, we hate it.

It flies in the face of everything that made *GHII* so great. If *GHIII* is the sweet caress of an eager groupie, Battle Mode is the kick in the wedding vegetables from your half-cut tour manager. You can avoid it in multiplayer, but you can't escape

it in career mode – you need to plough through three Boss Battles in order to proceed through, and ultimately finish, the game. One against Tom Morello, one against Slash and one against the Devil.

They're not fun, and the final one is the worst offender.

If, like us, you play through the game on the Hard setting you'll be completely stumped by the final Battle. The worst thing is you need to play for an age before the battle begins, and the Devil receives the first power-up, which he activates and inevitably ruins your shot at getting one yourself. It's an absolute disaster.

If you got stuck on 'Freebird' at the end of *GHII* it was because the song was just too tough – not because the game was doing everything in its power to sabotage you. You see, it works like this. Nailing certain runs earns you power-ups that you can fling at your opponent by activating star power. These power-ups are designed purely to dick you around – broken strings (tap a button to repair

it), amp overload (your note chart starts strobing), lefty flip (the fret buttons are all reversed), etcetera, etcetera. Each and every one is incredibly annoying, and lefty flip in particular is basically a death sentence. Imagine someone covering your eyes while you played *Burnout*. Reflect on how frustrating that would be. Now imagine how frustrating it is when you're doing your utmost to keep up with 'The Devil Went Down To Georgia' and suddenly everything is mirrored.

Battle Mode is no fun against a friend either. *GHII* proved co-op was the way forward, a concept that the upcoming *Rock Band* expands on dramatically. Facing off, playing the same track for maximum points to determine the ultimate axemeister will always have its place, but guitar combat just seems completely irrelevant. Oddly, despite the presences of a co-op career mode suggesting *GHIII* is taking co-op more seriously than *GHII*, there is no co-op quick play. What this means is that you want to play a later

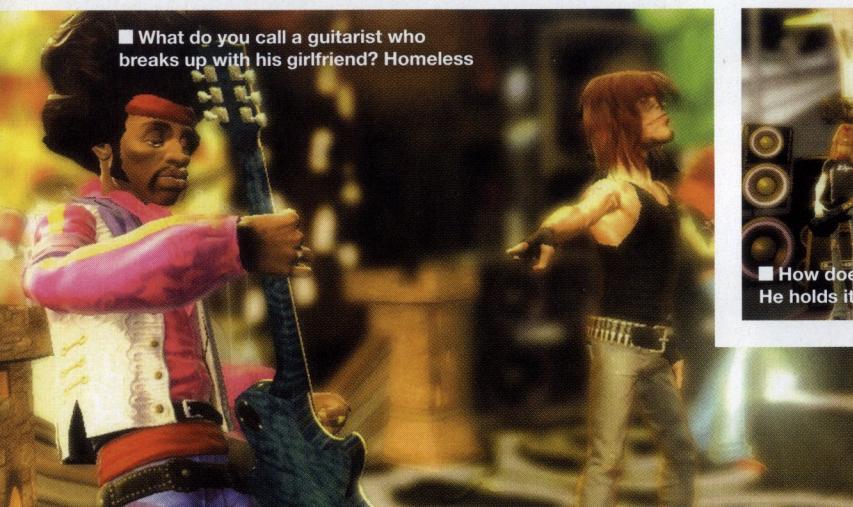
song co-op you need to play all the way through co-op career and unlock it. Worse still, the difficulty is set from the beginning, so if a one player wants to change their difficulty setting you need to start another co-op career. It makes co-op unnecessarily inaccessible, especially for a party game.

EVEN FLOW, THOUGHTS ARRIVE LIKE BUTTERFLIES...

All things considered, *GHIII* is still a total cracker of a game. It's truly brilliant fun and, at its best, you won't find a better music game. The quality of song selection, the abundance of master tracks and the incredibly addictive nature of *GH* itself makes *GHIII* a sure thing, even though it's sullied somewhat by Battle Mode. As fantastic as *GHIII* is, however, we just can't stop thinking of *Rock Band* – a game that'll do what *GH* does and twice as much more. That was, after all, where we thought the *GH* series would logically head. **Luke Reilly**

"The quality of song selection, the abundance of master tracks and the incredibly addictive nature of *GH* itself makes *GHIII* a sure thing, even though it's sullied somewhat by Battle Mode."

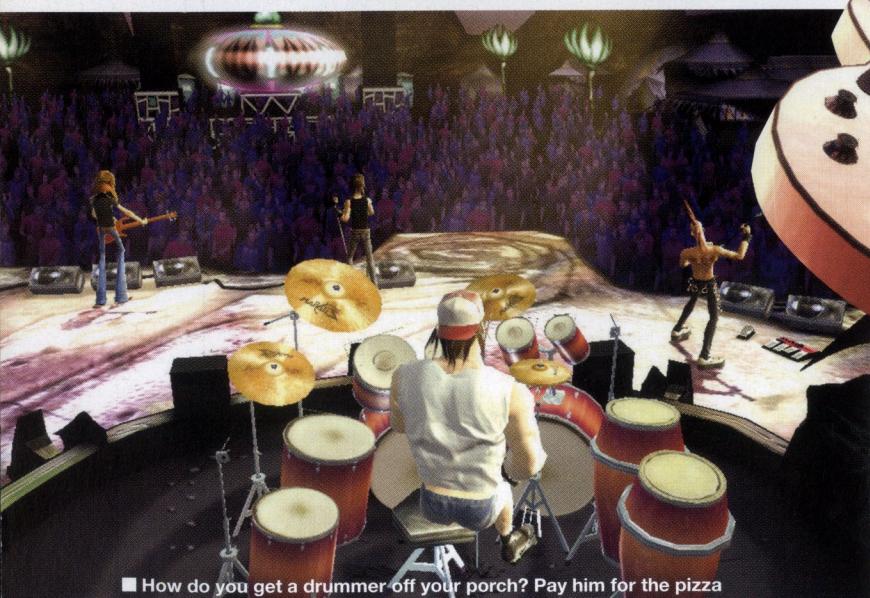
■ What do you call a guitarist who breaks up with his girlfriend? Homeless



■ How does a lead singer change a light bulb? He holds it and the world revolves around him



■ How can you tell if there is a guitarist at the door? He knocks out of time and comes in too early



■ How do you get a drummer off your porch? Pay him for the pizza

IF LOOKS COULD THRILL

There are more important things central to being a good guitarist than actually being good at guitar. Sure, it's handy, but here are a few things you can learn from *Guitar Hero III* artists that'll make you look bad-arse.

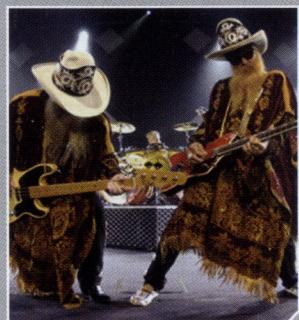
DOUBLE GUITARS

You know those guitars that are, like... DOUBLE guitars? Yeah? Well, by their very nature a double guitar is twice as cool as a regular guitar. That's just maths people. You can't argue with numbers.



BEARDS

Beards are rad. Jesus? He totally had a beard. So does Sean Connery, and he's even cooler than Jesus. There's just something about a great big beard that makes you look like a guitar sage.



PLAYING IT BEHIND YOUR HEAD

Remember when you used to ride your bike with no hands? Well, this is cooler. About the greatest guitar trick you can do short of actually playing it with your penis.



PROS:

- Master tracks, great covers
- As fun as ever

CONS:

- Battle Mode is rubbish
- Slightly inaccessible co-op

VERDICT:

Captures everything perfect about *GH* but ever-so-nearly spoiled by Battle Mode.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
09



PlayStation Portable

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ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW. JUST.

Listen up. Something's going down in Capital State. New gangs have appeared outta nowhere and we gotta take 'em down. We'll catch these scum on foot, in helicopters; hell, even jumping from speeding cars. We even gotcha a team of hard nuts to help with the dirty work.

Now let's get out there and deliver some Extreme Justice.



Moderate
Violence



pursuitforce.com

Available November.



■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

■ PLAYERS: 1-8
■ PRICE: \$119.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.neversoft.com

■ BACK STORY: The *Tony Hawk* franchise basically invented and owned an entire genre since its inception, but with the revolutionary *SKATE* redefining how we control these games *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* is undoubtedly on the back foot. Can he recover with his mad skating skillz?

TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

Can the Hawkman outskate *SKATE*?

Damn, the Hawkman sure didn't see this one coming, sitting regally upon his throne. That pesky little *SKATE* kid rode roughshod into his domain and tore the rulebook to shreds, redefining how a next gen skating game could, and should, be played. Now that lofty perch seems pretty insecure, the Hawkman is teetering on the edge, and this time round a mediocre updated sequel is simply not enough. After the mindblowing *SKATE* kickflipped into our world last month it's going to take a lot more than a few tacked on features to match the ingenuity of EA's extreme sports masterpiece.

So can *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* pull it out of the bag? It's a tricky question. The fact that *SKATE* was a completely new franchise with absolutely

no baggage puts the game at an immediate advantage. While *SKATE* was relatively free to build its innovative control system from the ground up, *THPG* had to build on previous installments.

Because when it comes to baggage *THPG* is the gaming equivalent of Britney Spears: a bloated, self-conscious parody of its previous genius. Stuck between an obvious need to reinvent itself, and compulsive desire to slowly build upon what it knows best, *Tony Hawk's* as a whole has struggled.

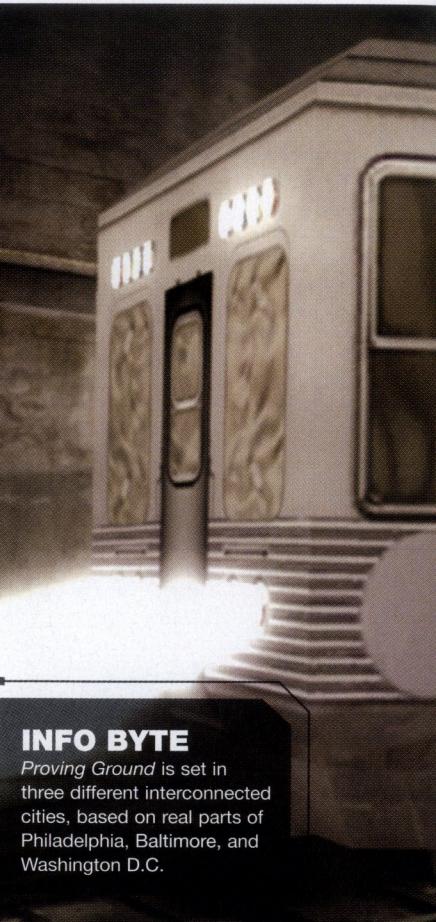
NAILING IT...

Sadly, with *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground*, there has been no 'from the ground up' reinvention of the franchise. There is however, a direct attempt to build upon the interesting 'Nail the Trick' feature that

made last year's *Tony Hawk Project 8* worth more than a passing glance.

This feature remains as fun as it was in *Tony Hawk's Project 8*; the left and right analogue sticks represent your left and right feet, and moving the sticks allows you to perform a wide range of tricks in slo-mo. Pulling off tricks in this mode will give you higher scores, and the sense of satisfaction that comes with more precise in-depth controls. 'Nail the Trick' is undoubtedly the best feature added to the franchise in recent years.

But it's hard not to question the consistency of the whole thing. Outside of the 'Nail the Trick' mode hitting a kickflip is as simple as hitting the @ button, and this begs the question: why should you have to enter slo-mo and perform the complex movements necessary to land a kickflip instead of simply pushing a button? It's undoubtedly fun, but hideously inconsistent and, on the face of things, makes little sense.



INFO BYTE

Proving Ground is set in three different interconnected cities, based on real parts of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C.



■ Rockin... radical... tubular... cowabunga... these are all words that real skaters say. It's a fact, jack.



"The myriad of button presses required to pull off tricks in *Tony Hawk's* now seems ridiculously alienating when compared to the simplistic beauty of *SKATE*'s revolutionary system."

SUPER GLUE

And it's this kind of bloated inconsistency that plagues *Tony Hawk* in all aspects, with a game design that clumsily glues all the previous game modes and control systems with new updated versions. Predictably, none of it co-exists with any kind of fluency, resulting in what is basically an over-wrought sticky mess.

Whereas *SKATE* succeeded in creating a system that was simple, yet nuanced, the endless updates of *Tony Hawk*'s initially streamlined control system have left it impotent, completely overdeveloped, and incapable of competing with anything *SKATE* has to offer. The myriad of button presses required to pull off tricks in *Tony Hawk's* now seems ridiculously alienating when compared to the simplistic beauty of *SKATE*'s revolutionary system.

STOP TALKING ABOUT *SKATE* YOU DAMN FOOL!

Okay, okay! But it is hard to talk about one without the other. If *SKATE* never existed, we'd no doubt be talking about *Tony Hawk*'s new career path options – so let's chat.

Proving Ground allows you to take part in three different types of skating challenges: rigger, hardcore, or career, and the challenges you complete help shape the skater you become.

It's an interesting system that gives players the freedom to develop as a skater throughout the game, but it's hard to escape the feeling that the whole thing seems a little redundant. The game barely changes depending on which course you prefer, and only really succeeds in providing a non-linear approach to the game, which is undoubtedly helpful if you hit a dead end, or struggle with some of the more difficult challenges.

The area where *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* really succeeds, however, is in the video editing section. The options are genuinely staggering, with endless options for filters, trims, and slo-mo. The

editor almost matches many professional applications and is surprisingly user friendly, but at the end of the day there's no escaping the fact that the *Tony Hawk*'s franchise has been superseded by a superior, more refined product, and a well-designed video editor isn't going to change that simple fact.

It's a case of terrible timing. If *SKATE* had never been released, we'd quite possibly be commanding *Proving Ground* as a valiant attempt to add depth to what was essentially a last gen title with bells on. Now, of course, that judgement is irrelevant, we've seen the potential of next gen skating and we don't want to move backwards. Burdened with years of updates, and bogged down by history, *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* can't hope to compete with the revolutionary *SKATE*. **Mark Serrels**

PROS:

- Best video editor in gaming
- 'Nail the Trick' is still cool

CONS:

- Overly complicated
- Bloated and inconsistent

VERDICT:

Struggles to escape from the newly cast shadow of EA's *SKATE*.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

06



RIGGER

Rigger's are creative skaters, who like to create their own places to trick and grind, like Bam Margera, Rodney Mullen and Daewon Song.



HARDCORE

These guys just skate for the hell of it, and are represented by Mike Vallely and Dustin Dollin amongst others...



■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: EA CANADA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-7
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.ea.com

■ BACK STORY: EA has been snapping at the heels of *Pro Evo* for years now, battling in vain to steal the top spot from the reigning champ. With an all new Be a Pro mode and a silky new Pro Skills system, can *FIFA* knock *Pro Evo* off its lofty perch?

FIFA 08

A last minute upset?

Soccer is a sport that thrives on rivalry; Rangers vs. Celtic, Boca Juniors vs. River Plate, Real Madrid vs. Barcelona. That combustible element that exists between two teams, loaded with history, bigotry and an outright genuine hatred between two sets of fans, is what fuels the sport and makes it great. In such rivalries the teams become so inextricably linked that it becomes impossible to talk about one without the other. Within the realm of videogames we also have such a rivalry: *FIFA* vs. *Pro Evolution Soccer*.

So another season, another match up. *FIFA* as always comes bursting out of the blocks from the get go, screaming at the top of its lungs about its new features – the Be a Pro mode, the Pro Skills, its updated AI – while *Pro Evo* remains content in its superiority, its usually superior control mechanics, secure in the fact that, despite its inferior presentation and lack of licensed teams, it's the undoubted game of choice for soccer fanatics. But could it be different this time round? Could 2008 finally be *FIFA*'s year?

THE TALE OF THE TAPE

First off, the aspects of soccer that EA always gets right are present and correct as ever in *FIFA* 08. The licensed teams look as fantastic as we'd expect, with team kits and even individual players looking absolutely spot on. The addition of the local A-league will undoubtedly be a huge incentive for Aussie soccer nuts.

The always stellar commentary (by Martin Tyler and Andy Gray) is also worthy of a mention, flowing perfectly with hardly any of the delayed slip-ups that usually render sports commentary hilarious for all

the wrong reasons. While this sort of banter can often become patronising, especially for experts with a knowledge of the game, in *FIFA* it actually adds to the atmosphere with the commentators often commenting on the actual history of certain match ups automatically: an excellent touch that will delight fans. It really illustrates the effort gone into the presentation of *FIFA* 08.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CORE GAMEPLAY ITSELF?

Well, basically *FIFA* 08 plays more like *Pro Evo* than ever before, and while this may sound like the ultimate back handed compliment, it's not. We simply mean that this time round *FIFA* has nailed the basic mechanics of videogame soccer better than ever before.

In essence *FIFA* has always been the Real Madrid of videogames: a big spending title that looks unstoppable on paper, yet never clicks as a total package and ultimately fails to become anything more than the sum of its parts. With *FIFA* 08, however, there has been a concerted effort to work on the things that have always troubled *FIFA*, such as team AI – which has improved rapidly.

AND THE NEW STUFF?

Well the new stuff, depending on what you like and don't like about soccer, could either be detrimental or beneficial to your overall experience.

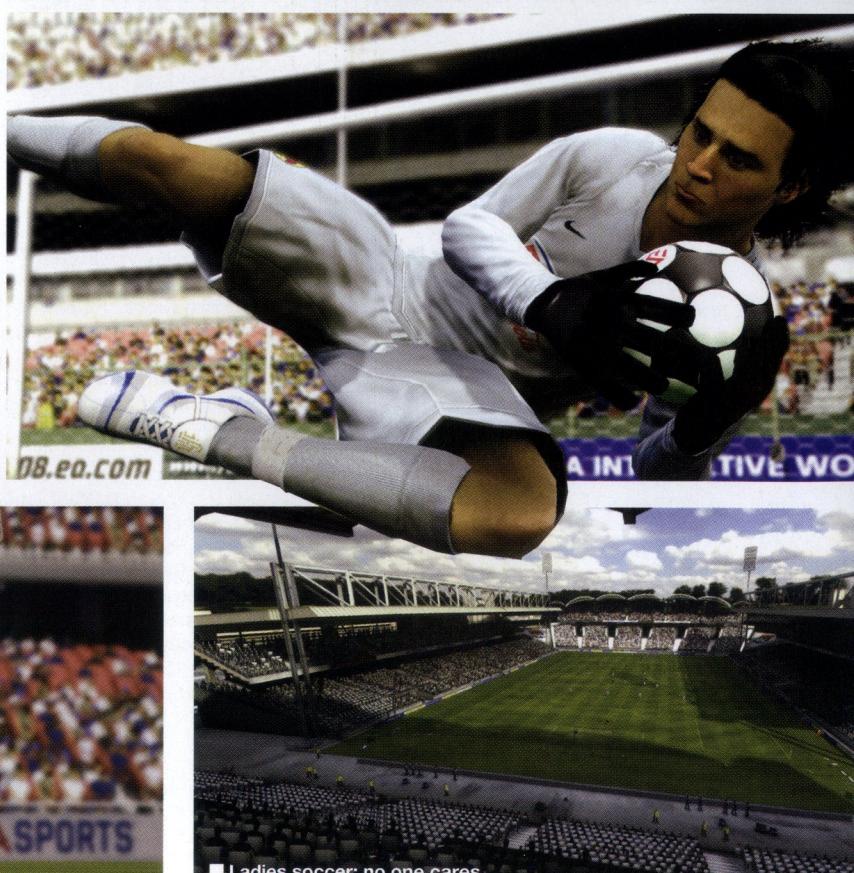
The Be a Pro mode is the most substantial update to *FIFA* 08, and your enjoyment of this mode is primarily dependent upon how much you love/ loath soccer. Playing the whole entire match as one single player in the team



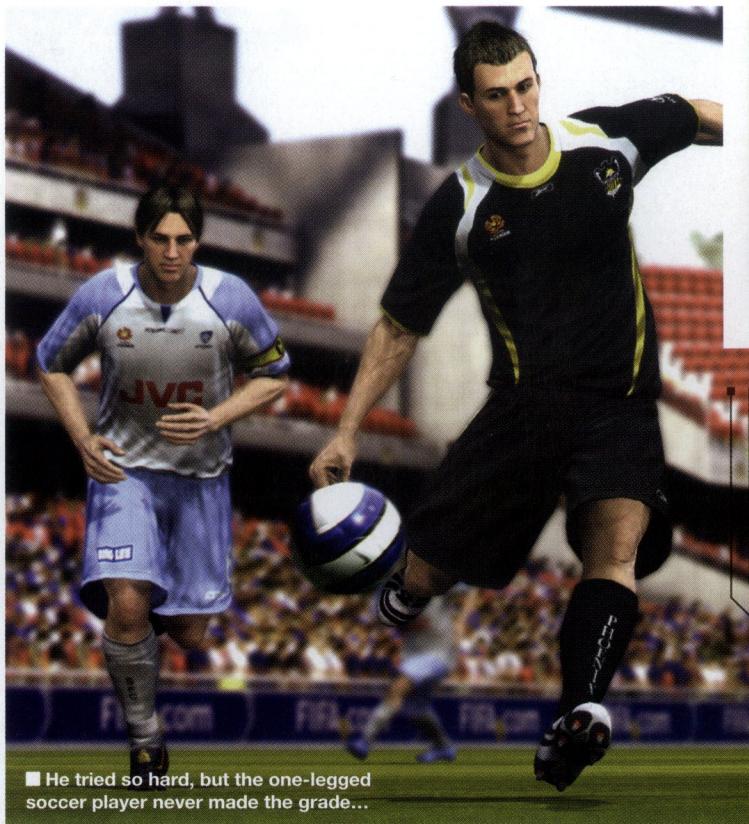
■ Aussie teams – flaming mongrels...



■ Getting a brand new mitre soccer ball blasted off your face on a cold day is the most painful thing EVER. Take that childbirth!



■ Ladies soccer: no one cares...



SOCcer RIVALRIES

Soccer's most heated rivalries make the *Pro Evo* vs. *FIFA* rivalry look like child's play. Check some of these out...

GLASGOW RANGERS VS. GLASGOW CELTIC

A claustrophobic, parochial maelstrom of religion, politics, and bigotry wrapped up in an intense 90 minutes of soccer. With a history that harks back to the immigrant Irish battling with the established Scottish for jobs in Glasgow in the 1800s, this rivalry is super deep.



REAL MADRID VS. BARCELONA

During the fascist Franco dictatorship, FC Barcelona becomes a shining beacon of light for repressed Catalans, while the government run Real Madrid becomes a symbol of oppression. Top player Luis Figo had a severed pig's head thrown at him after switching from Barca to Real in the year 2000.



BOCA JUNIORS VS. RIVER PLATE

The traditionally working class Boca Juniors hate the upper class River Plate, and the feeling is mutual. Fireworks and various other missiles usually render this match unplayable, which is probably for the best since most matches end in riots anyway...



"FIFA 08 utilises a dynamic camera that follows your player, adjusting intelligently to the situation he finds himself within the context of the game."

might not appeal to casual fans with a rudimentary understanding of the sport of soccer, but the hardcore will undoubtedly revel in the opportunity to play an entire 90 minutes as Ronaldinho, Kaka, or Wayne Rooney.

But ironically, one of Be a Pro's coolest features, the new camera system, ultimately becomes its undoing. *FIFA 08* utilises a dynamic camera that follows your player, adjusting intelligently to the situation he finds himself within the context of the game. For example, when the ball is out of reach, and your role becomes that of positioning or man marking an opposing player, the camera adjusts accordingly, zooming out for a greater view of the pitch. When you get a hold of the ball however, the camera fixes behind you, and claustrophobically follows you when dribbling at speed.

This all sounds good on paper, but true fans of soccer (the undoubtedly target market for this feature) may find it off putting. Because anyone who plays soccer seriously would understand that it would actually be preferable for a closer

camera view when man marking, and a wider, more exposed view for when you gain possession of the ball (especially for midfielders, since you need to be aware of your team mates' positioning for long range passes). The whole dynamic camera seems to be designed for a gimmicky, shallow type of excitement, as opposed actually functioning correctly within a game situation.

MAD SKILLZ...

But *FIFA 08* undoubtedly redeems itself in other areas, most notably with its new Pro Skills feature. By holding down **L1** and using the right analogue stick players can perform just about every trick in the book, from Ronaldinho's gravity defying 'flip flap' to Zidane's pirouette. Despite the fact the

system seems to be a bit random and not as precise as we'd like, it's still fun to dazzle some dozy defenders with some fancy footwork.

It's undoubtedly the best *FIFA* yet: the core gameplay is solid and the AI is a vast improvement over previous iterations. Combine this with the usual high standard of presentation and it's safe to say that *Pro Evo* finally has some real competition this time round. And although the 'Be a Pro' mode is a bit of failed experiment with mixed results, it can't detract from what is an extremely solid soccer game (undoubtedly the franchise's best effort to date). Depending on what Konami does with the upcoming *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008*, we could be looking at the new champion. **Mark Serrels**

PROS:

- Best *FIFA* yet
- Slick new 'Pro Skills' controls
- Be a Pro mode fails
- Awkward camera angles

CONS:

- Be a Pro mode fails
- Awkward camera angles

VERDICT:

The game that finally puts *FIFA* on a level pegging with *Pro Evo*.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

08

■ GENRE: STRATEGY
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: OMEGA FORCE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$69.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.gamecity.ne.jp/bladestorm

■ BACK STORY: Koei is using *Bladestorm* to move in a new direction, but one that is still (vaguely) moored in the annals of history, after almost exhausting its *Kessen* and *Dynasty Warriors* franchises in recent years.

■ "On my mark unleash the... MACARENA!"



BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

Hitting a century...

History is a funny thing. Different people have different memories of the same events, so we end up in a situation where – speaking as an Englishman – the deciding goal in England's heroic 1966 World Cup Final victory over Germany was either, a) over the goal line (which it definitely WAS) or, b) not over the goal line (please don't be bitter now, dear German friends).

Zoom back 629 years to 1337 and England was about to get involved in another famous battle: this is when the so-called Hundred Years' War began, which actually lasted 116 years.

Now don't forget to do your homework and see you in class tomorrow... no, WAIT! This is where *Bladestorm* comes in. We have a videogame to talk about – don't leave your desks just yet!

CROSS-CHANNEL FIGHTING

That's right: Koei's *Bladestorm* is set in the middle of the Hundred Years' War, a period of conflict between England and France. And you enter the stage as a freelancer, picking up contracts to command armies from either side of the English Channel. Because you're free to battle for either side, your main motivation is self-preservation – well, that and money.

You need to have some sort of long-term plan, though, because *Bladestorm*'s battlefield is constantly evolving and covers the entirety of France. It feels like you're back there, pitched into the middle of a historically significant period, and you can only play your role as best you can – no matter what you do, things are changing in unpredictable ways.

But the historical side of the *Bladestorm* isn't its key strength: that

would be its curious merging of gameplay styles, which blends action and strategy elements to give us something of an action RTS game. (In fact, the whole Hundred Years' War history thing becomes completely absurd when Koei introduces Arabian soldiers on camelback and samurai with katana swords. Presumably, the developer thought that these characters would add a bit of additional spice to the action – but their appearance actually undermines a lot of the effort that has been put into setting the Hundred Years' War scene. Can you imagine a WWII sim that features cameos from UFOs and Teletubbies? Koei probably can...)

'ACTION RTS'?

Bladestorm is unlike the *Dynasty Warriors* games, which you can almost play

without looking if you're willing to tap random buttons at a decent pace for a long time, and it's unlike Koei's chin-stroking *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* series, which progresses as quickly as the development of mountains.

Instead, right in the middle of those two pillars of Koei's historical output, *Bladestorm* asks you to think strategically while running/riding around battlefields. You're not a super-powerful warrior in *Bladestorm* – you're just a highly mobile commander – so your main obligation is... to command. Command battalions. To do this, you just need to approach your units, click **X**, and then lead them to wherever you think they should be attacking the enemy from.

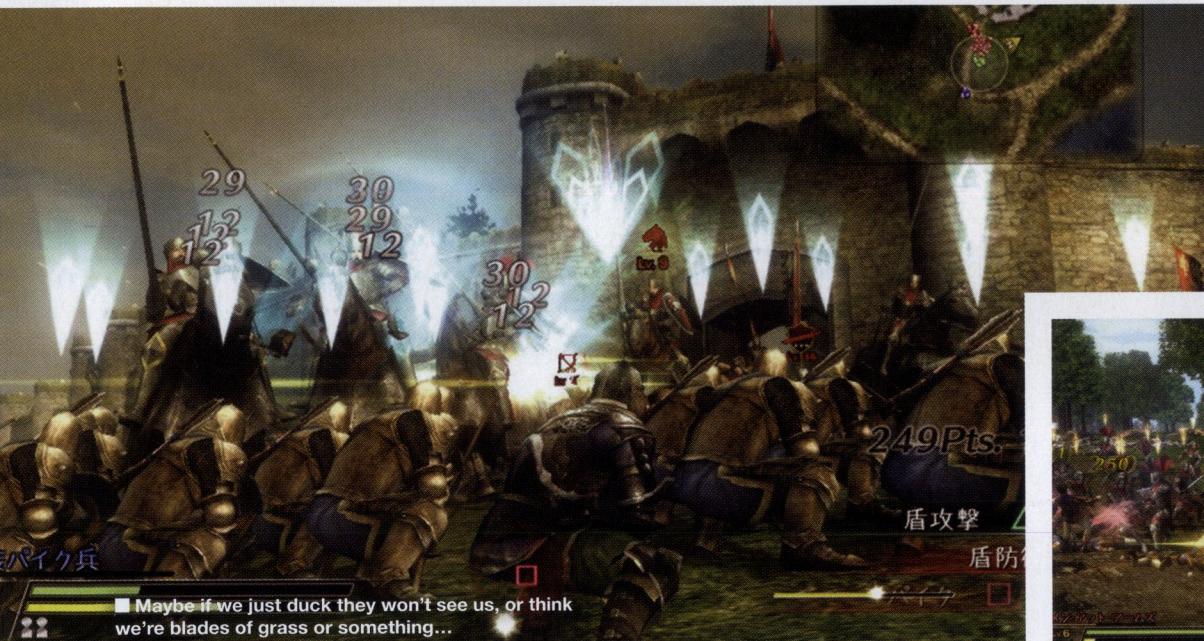
Your units are all obedient, and you can direct them by enacting whatever it is you want them to do – fire arrows in a



INFO BYTE
Bladestorm was a big hit when it arrived on the PS3 in Japan this summer. It sold 59,000 units in its first week on sale there, giving the PS3 a much-needed boost in the traditionally release-dry summer period. Still, *Bladestorm* has a long way to go before it rivals Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series, which has amassed more than nine million sales since first appearing ten years ago.

VIRTUAL UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Before even setting off for the French countryside, *Bladestorm* enables you to design a character that resembles your own person, and that character then acts as your avatar in battle. You can choose a face type, a haircut, and even a voice (there are three pitches that can be selected). This adds a neat personal touch to what would otherwise have been a faceless strategy game. It's just a shame that you can't, say, map a photo of your actual face to the character models.



certain direction, for example, and your archery unit will copy your actions. And then you can leave them to it and go off and command other units. So during battle you will be constantly busy, but not busy in the *Dynasty Warriors* button-mashing sense.

Bladestorm's greatest achievement is the way in which it makes you feel as though every little decision you make can have an effect on the outcome of the whole war. Map screens are insanely detailed, and the depiction of France and the shifting of power across the nation is enough to make *Bladestorm* feel like an epic. The length of the game also helps on that front: depending on how you play through it, *Bladestorm* can supply you with many hours of play.

Even though the game takes place

exclusively within the borders of France, there is a surprising degree of variation here – battles are fought across open plains, right through the middle of sleepy towns and villages, in-between chateaux, and in forests. The full richness of France's 14th century topography has been recreated here, which in itself is a great achievement.

Ultimately, you have to keep on returning to your local inn for new contracts and in order to converse with other commanders, but the game feels wide open in spite of that constraint.

Fortunately, enemy AI is pretty decent. You're not just attacking a pack of braindead virtual soldiers – you're attacking intelligent soldiers, and they're clever enough to pre-empt your attacks with manoeuvres of their own. You always

need to be alert and keep a watchful eye on the battlefield map.

WAR CAN BE UGLY

Unfortunately, though, *Bladestorm* doesn't quite provide flawless visuals to go with its engrossing brand of gameplay. There's some slowdown when too many soldiers are on-screen simultaneously, and the animation of cavalry is a bit shoddy. Collision detection, too, is weak in places, which can occasionally lead to the

controls feeling a bit muddy.

Still, there's plenty of incentive to forgive *Bladestorm* for its rough edges: it tries something a bit different and, with the exception of unnecessary foreign fighting units, it delivers a thoroughly absorbing tale of the Hundred Years' War and all the action it brought to the départements of France. If you want a tactical experience that also moves at a fair pace, *Bladestorm* is definitely your game. **Jonti Davies**

PROS:

- Nice blending of genres
- Long lasting game

CONS:

- Silly inclusion of samurai
- Some graphical problems

VERDICT: A solid mix of genres wrapped up in an intriguing historical tale.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

■ GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: CODEMASTER
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$109.95
■ HD: 1080p
■ WEB: www.codemasters.com/jericho

■ BACK STORY: Clive Barker was once tipped to be the new Stephen King. Then he did an about-face and vanished into fantasy land (literally, he started writing fantasy novels) which were fine and all – but contained far less faces being ripped off.

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

Sadly we reckon Clive's barking up the wrong tree here...

Oh Clive, what have you gone and done, mate? Sorry readers, we're just busy berating Clive Barker – conceptual creator of the new PS3 horror-themed shooter *Jericho*. Some of you, those who have read those big paper things you get in shops ("books", they're called, we believe) will know Mr. Barker from his excellent horror novels (*The Books of Blood* kick so much arse – if you haven't read them punch yourself in the neck in shame!) and his slightly-less-excellent-but-still-damn-good fantasy and paintings.

Clive's been barking for some time now about wanting to get back into horror. Now this is no small claim. Other than his books, he created one of the most enduring horror franchises: *Hellraiser*, with its spiky protagonist

Pinhead (favourite of horror fans and poorly photocopied onto flyers for shonky Goth clubs everywhere!) and *Nightbreed* – based on his novel *Cabal*.

IT ALL SOUNDS GOOD SO FAR, BIG DADDY!

It does, doesn't it? Anyway, *Jericho* is the brainchild of Codemasters and Barker. When we first got to have a little hands-on time it was looking good... in a hideous, slimy, gory kind of way.

And at first glance the finished product looked good too: the monsters were all fetishist-like; shiny and hardcore – all mouths, spikes, leather and squirming orifices – the action was fast and furious, taking the standard FPS but giving you a bit of extra mojo.

Not only does each character have

a weapon with secondary fire, they're also gifted with magic: blood magic, healing magic, magic bullets, exorcism, giant flame dragons and such but – even better – your character, after being made non-corporeal early on in the game, can actually jump into the bodies of each of the six-person squad and use their weapons to wreak havoc on the monster population of, erm... "the box".

HUH? WHAT IS THIS "THE BOX" YOU SPEAK OF, ODDLY SHAPED HU-MAN?

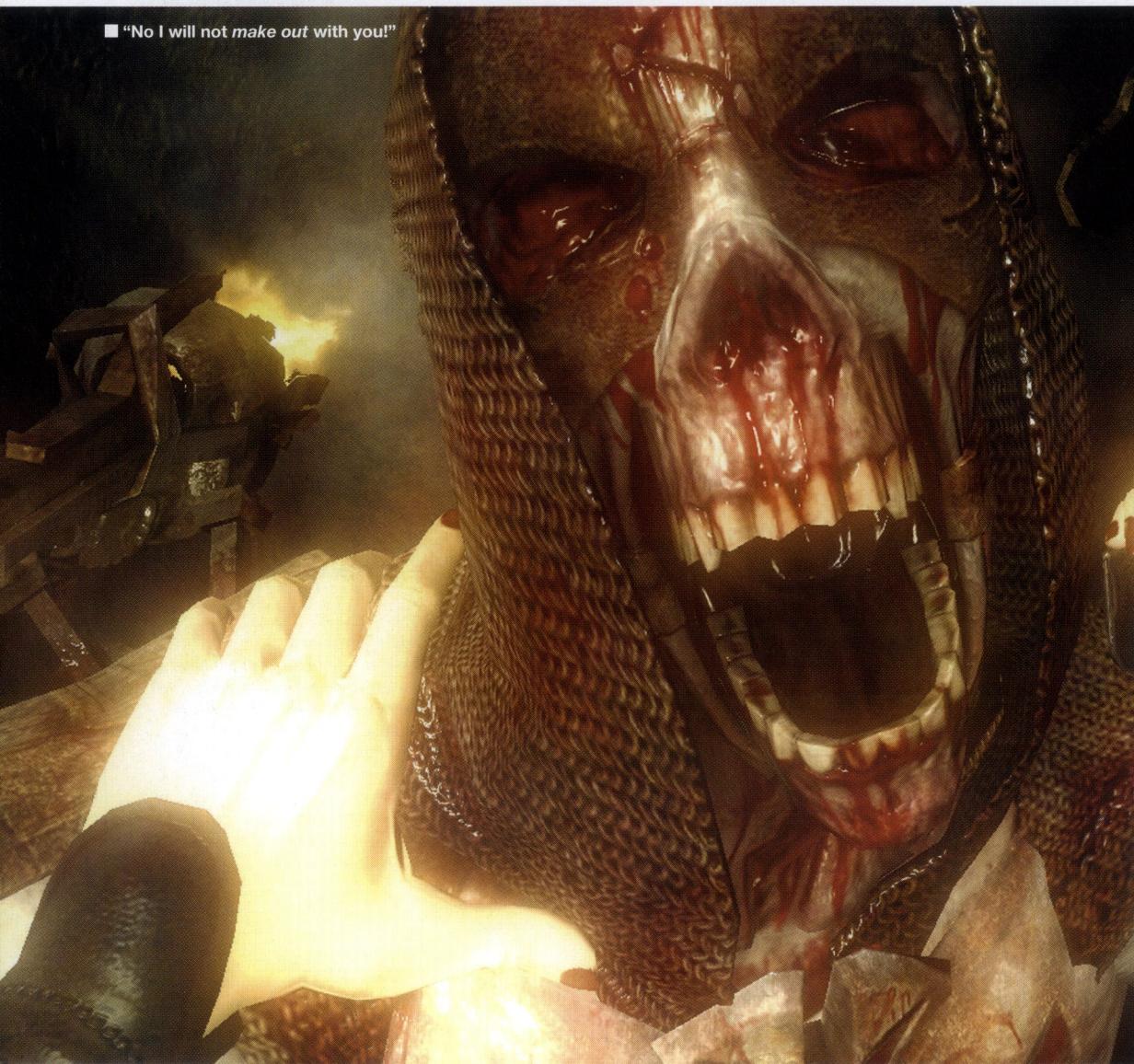
"The box" is sort of a dimensional rift where, um, God hid the First-born. See God apparently made the First-born before man and answered the age-old question: "Could God microwave a burrito so hot even He couldn't eat it?" The

answer is, apparently, yes – in the form of the First-born. It actually looks like that dancing baby, but slightly less evil, and has all the power of God and none of the bearded bloke's jaunty sense of humour.

Being packed away in the box has done little for the First-born's mood and it's up to *Jericho* squad to go through a bunch of *Stargate* looking dealies and fight monsters...

And then go through another one, and fight more of the same monsters. Oh, there'll be a boss fight here and there – the one with the fat dude on a flying fox that literally tries to spill his guts on you is cool, as are several others – but it all starts to feel awfully samey after a while. Now, don't get us wrong – the first time the spiky fisted creature attacking you cops a dose of hot lead to the scone and

■ "No I will not make out with you!"



INFO BYTE

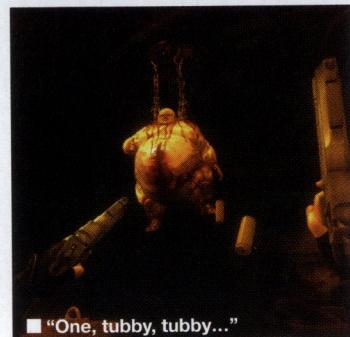
Clive, can we call ya Clive? Thanks. Listen, mate, forget *Jericho*. You have a perfectly fine universe ready made: *Hellraiser*, dude! Here's the game: You play as Pinhead and rip the flesh off mortals with those cool chains. Mate, come on! Call up the office. We'll talk. Cheers! Oh, um, by the way – do you have that chick Cenobite's number? She's kind of hot... in a evil, succubus kind of way... er... someone wanted to know. *cough* Anthony *cough*

■ What is the best way to get rid of a demon? Exorcise a lot!

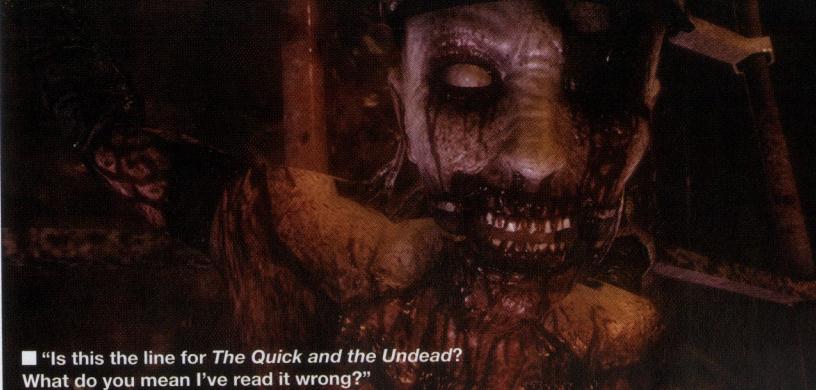




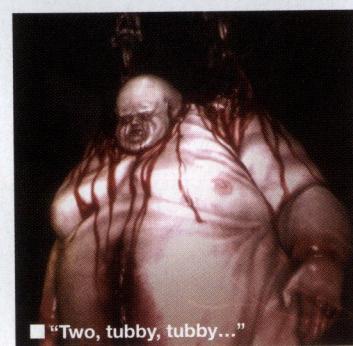
■ Don't kiss him (he's horny)



■ "One, tubby, tubby..."



■ "Is this the line for *The Quick and the Undead*? What do you mean I've read it wrong?"



■ "Two, tubby, tubby..."

HE'S ONE TOUGH MELON FARMER!

You're currently looking through the eyes of Delago, arguably the toughest member of Jericho, his chaingun arm, high calibre pistol and dragon that shoots from his arm – and actually burns his flesh, but more importantly the sickly, pallid flesh of his foes – make him a logical choice for most of the scary beast shootin'. Although he can't slow down time or shoot a magical bullet like some fancy pants team members, his fire dragon, fire shield and bitchin' ordinance put him near the top of the hard funken bastard list. Also – like all characters he can resurrect a fallen foe with a touch. Sweet.



it's kind of wasted: you can sort of order your squad around with it. Occasionally they seem to do what you tell them. Sometimes they just stare at you like a dog being shown a card trick. It can get frustrating, needless to say.

YAY OR NAY, YA HAIRY EJIT?

Look, there's a lot to like about *Jericho*. Slick graphics, good character models (even if the Jericho squad looks a tad stiff and dressed for a Nine Inch Nails gig) and some truly imaginative monsters... paired with gameplay we've seen a hundred times before and a plot that starts off interestingly and then... sort of trickles off. Repetitive, if enjoyable, combat lifts the game above average – but not very far.

Not great, not even close to some of Barker's early stuff, and although longish, not exactly a challenging adventure. *Clive Barker's Jericho* is by no means a failure, but it really should have been so much more. **Anthony O'Connor**



its head explodes in a gory shower of viscera, giblets and brain meats – you'll probably enjoy it. Perhaps even hoot.

We did. Hoot, that is. Like a pack of owls, we were.

Even the second, third and, hell, twenty sixth time. But after a while you're just shooting not hooting, occasionally doing one of those now ubiquitous "press the right button at the right time mini-game" – in this case to exorcise an SS she-devil monster chick er... thing. Plus a few times you'll slap a foe around, or not, depending on your performance. And sometimes you'll need to climb a crumbling wall. Okay, they're hardly original (does any game not have one of these now?) but they do at least offer a bit of variety.

SO IS IT MAGIC?

Sadly, no. Sometimes the squad is split, sometimes they're together – the game tries hard to hide the fact you're pretty much doing the same thing in dark, foggy levels, over and over – barring the odd piss-easy puzzle – until you reach the abrupt, insanely easy, and obtuse, ending – but we're not fooled, readers. Just as *Medal of Honor Airborne* only gave us the same game as the PS2 version but with better graphics, this feels like an

HOW'S SHE PLAY?

The gameplay is, well... patchy. The shooting is fine, and using the magic each character has is quite easy, although the fact you can't upgrade these powers seems a missed opportunity, and possessing another character can be a hassle in the middle of combat.

You can either aim your reticle at the desired host body and press **X** or keep **X** held down and pick their name. But in the middle of fighting a nest of what look like sabre-toothed arseholes on legs a man doesn't have time for that sort of jibber jabber! Why not use the D-pad for a quick trip to the next player? As it is

PROS:

- Body hopping is cool
- Sick and twisted monsters

CONS:

- Not enough variety
- It's Doom/Quake/etc.

VERDICT:

Murky levels, control issues, repetitive combat – it just isn't that impressive. Damn.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

06

■ GENRE: ADVENTURE
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER
■ DEVELOPER: NIHILISTIC
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 1080p
■ WEB: www.conanthevideogame.com

■ BACK STORY: This Conan is based off the original pulp fiction created by Robert E. Howard way back in the '30s, the original Cimmerian hothead that preceded Schwarzenegger. The game's style is derived from Marvel's early *Conan* comics.

INFO BYTE

Author Howard didn't create Conan to be a brainless ape of a man, but rather a warrior that struggled with deep questions and depression. Indeed Howard himself struggled with depression, eventually committing suicide.



■ Conan: always getting 'head'

CONAN

Lock up your daughters, here bounds the Prince of Mince

It's all about the boobies. Yes, this is a bloody butcher-like grinder that makes *God of War* and *Heavenly Sword* look like they were made for depressed and impressionable thumb suckers. Yes, there's wave after wave of guts and gore, of split insides and rotting outsides. And yes, there are all sorts of demonic phantoms tearing themselves to bits with rage in shadowy corners. But to really sum up the appeal, the scent of *Conan*, you can't do better than state that there are more boobs-out babes tied up in this game than in a Hugh Hefner wet dream. They're littered about the place, aching to be rescued by a hulking he-man who's man-breasts are bigger than their own. It's an instant pay-off aimed squarely at older (though we dare not utter "mature") game bangers who prefer their damsels undressed and their action hard-boiled – a flag of barbaric anti-restraint set in a dark fantasy world. Nothing sums up the game better.

THE CONAN IDENTITY

Conan has well and truly arrived. The

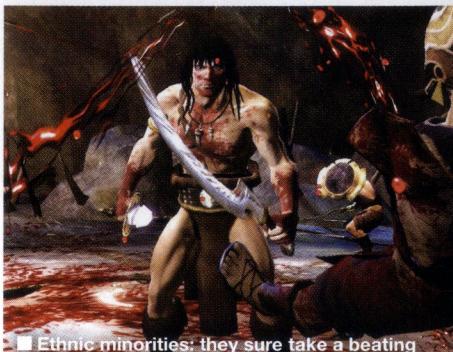
whole fiasco kicks off with our brute ravaging a mystic old tower in search of a legendary treasure. Unfortunately he slays one too many heinous ghouls and accidentally opens up a magical can of whoop ass that frees sleazy sorcerer Thoth Amon. The hocus-pocus bastard (who's probably a commie) nabs Conan's enchanted armour and blasts him off into the ocean where our lad washes up onto shore with a severe bout of amnesia. Cue hours and hours of decapitation, copulation and everything in between as the bone-fisted barbarian sets out to regain his memory and slay Amon to ease his sensitive conscious. What a SNAG, eh ladies?

Saving the day, in this case, is not complicated. Conan is all about killing. Fortunately he does it damn well, perhaps as well as anything else out there. While the game doesn't feature the sort of aerial acrobatics espoused by that hot mamma from *Heavenly Sword*, nor as many cool context sensitive attacks as Kratos, Conan beats them all hands down when it comes to knowing your enemy is dead.

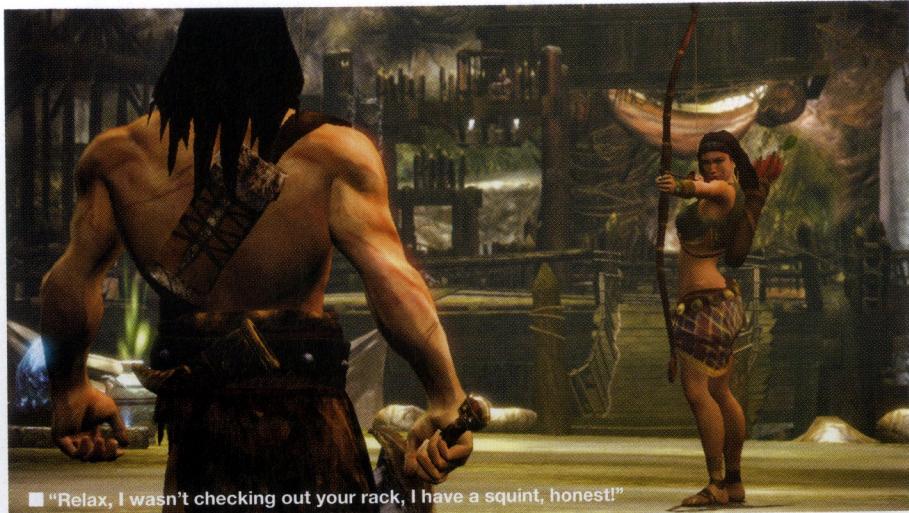
Guts machine that he is, he kills like an underpaid slaughterhouse hyster. Enemy limbs are hacked off with drug-addled aggression, heads are peeled off from behind, bodies are tossed and impaled on spikes, and torsos are severed regularly in two leaving only strands of intestines to flail and roll on the ground. So, no, this wouldn't be a healthy experience for that nephew of yours who likes to pull the legs off flies one by one.

MADNESS? THIS IS CONAAAAN!

Conan can attack using three different weapon stances. There's the one-handed sword stance that allows him to also carry a shield, dual swords for some fancy death moves, or the stance that sees him wield a massive two-handed blade that does insane damage and is useful for taking out enemies from a distance (those damn annoying lions – we're looking at YOU!). He can also do slick grapple moves like pile drivers and back breakers to mix the death up a bit, too. If your devious mind can think of it, Conan can probably do it.



■ Ethnic minorities: they sure take a beating



■ "Relax, I wasn't checking out your rack, I have a squint, honest!"



■ "Anyone ELSE want to question my decision to wear a loincloth?"



■ Even with a set of sparklers, Conan was deadly...



"Conan... kills like an underpaid slaughterhouse hysterical."

What's slick is that Conan can pick up any weapon in the game and either flail it around or pelt it at a nearby foe. Effectively this means you can muscle into a four-man mob with shield and sword, parry a blow then rip out the first attacker's heart, throw your shield at the next bloke, pick up the first guy's spear, shish kebab bloke number three with said spear, cut off the second guy's head then pick up his sword so you've got one in each hand, and then hack off the arms of the lucky last moron who thought it would be a breeze to beat you down with his buddies. It's all very 300.

Things get better, too. The pec-deck isn't the only piece of equipment Conan has a fancy for. As you smite bosses (see Elephwoooooar) and agents of evil along Conan's journey you'll regather his lost armour. With every piece collected you score a new magical ability. Your first power allows you turn nearby enemies into stone, but following powers allow all sorts of mayhem, including raining down brimstone on nearby enemies. It's stock standard, sure, but adds to the giggles.

This all could've counted for nought if the enemy AI was a push over or if

mob combat felt a bit too mish-mashed like in *Heavenly Sword*. Fortunately the battles in *Conan* have spine thanks to savvy enemies that regularly block and attack in numbers. Rolling about the place into strategic positions becomes just as important as pulling out shield-shattering combos and helps the action keep your nuts in a vice till the game's close.

LOOKS LIKE MURDER

So yeah, *Conan* is stout mass-murdering fun. That said its visual style won't be too everyone's tastes. In keeping with the connection to the original comic book series, the designers have attempted to recreate the look and feel of the book on the screen using paintbrush-inspired textures and some thick black shading around the characters. While this may have been intentional it doesn't work as

well as the team had hoped, with the game straddling some ambiguous middle ground between the true aesthetic of the comic and some washed out textures.

The other main reason why *Conan*'s score doesn't rocket up to the higher echelons is due to a few niggling issues. While the level design is generally solid for an all-out brawler, *God of War* has shown that mixing in some cerebral challenges amidst the combat goes a long way to refining a fighting game's pace. As mentioned, *Conan* has none of that. Throw in some repetitive enemies and voice work that causes the familiar sea of clichés to get washed up into your ears – it's clear that *Conan* would've benefited from better presentation.

Sure, *Conan* is not as good as *God of War II* or *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*, but it was never trying to be. Instead it's out to do its own thing. That's the barbarian way. But if you're the sort of person who likes to sit down with a controller and hack your way through a romp then you'll love *Conan*. We dig it. **James Ellis**

ELEPHWOOAAAARRR

As is customary, a big bold game that features a lot of sword-in-their-belly action demands the hero take a break from killing regular folk and take on a vast and angry assortment of scaly beasts. Beasts from hell. Conan agrees, and the adventure will see you going blow for blow against brutish ogres, sand dragons, sea creatures similar to the Kraken from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and shadowy elephant zombies out to tread on you like an entry-level stooge in the corporate cafeteria. Fortunately, unlike the maniacs at Capcom who make you restart the level if you die against a boss, being crushed into oblivion against these ungodly hounds means you can restart from the point right before you take them on. We appreciate this.

PROS:

- Solid hack and slash gaming
- Big bosses... mega babes

CONS:

- Graphics are a little dated
- Not for the faint of heart

VERDICT:

Conan is a bulldog of bloodletting, violence, savage adventure and boobies.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07



■ GENRE: STRATEGY/CARD BATTLE
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: SONY
■ DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$159.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.playstation.com.au

■ BACK STORY: Debuting at Sony's press conference at E3 2006, *The Eye of Judgement* uses the PlayStation Eye camera to add a new dimension to collectible card games, literally summoning animated 3D creatures from the cards to do battle.

THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT

Judge not, lest thou be judged!

We've all caught those morning cartoons at some stage where two 'duellists' square off, producing fearsome creatures from mere playing cards. There's definitely a cool aspect to being able to make creatures materialise out of nothingness, and developers at SCE Tokyo have spent the better part of three years at refining cutting edge CyberCode Matrix technology to make this a reality.

The Eye of Judgement is essentially a tabletop collectable trading card game, with the twist that the PS3's PlayStation Eye camera can recognise the cards and bring the creatures to life on your television screen.

The way to win the game is to summon five of your creatures onto the board before your opponent does – a seemingly simple premise, but actually putting it together while fending off your opponent's attacks is another matter altogether. Positioning is largely the key to victory, as creatures will be significantly stronger if placed on a zone of a matching element, and the direction they are placed in dictates the creature's offensive and defensive options. As well as going up

against a computer controlled opponent, you can have a two player duel locally, or go online to challenge opponents all over the world.

The card recognition is surprisingly quick and accurate, and on playing a card you're treated to an elaborate sequence of your creature bursting into being. Similarly, when two creatures engage each other, the combat animations are equally impressive. The physical cards themselves are well designed, with stylised art and their unique stats laid out in a format that's easy to read at a glance.

As there's a lot of gameplay mechanics to become familiar with in *EoJ*, it's highly recommended to sit through the extensive tutorial videos provided. The tutorials can get a bit tedious and drawn-out, but it is a testament to the surprising depth the game features.

Despite being aimed at adapting a very niche genre to PS3, the high price tag of *EoJ* is probably its greatest weakness. At a lower price tag, it would be easier for your average gamer to appreciate the value of the bundle and grab it for *EoJ* as well as future applications of the PlayStation Eye. At

\$160 though, *EoJ* is well beyond the realms of a casual purchase, and the potential market gets narrowed down to completionist card game collectors who also own a PS3 – yes, all three of you. Sure, if you buy the PlayStation Eye camera separately, you're looking at \$80, but any way you slice and dice it, it's still a lot of green.

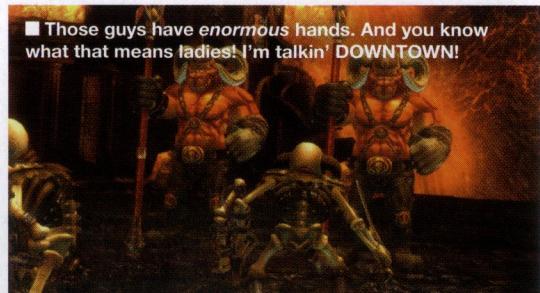
Despite the numerous barriers for entry, underneath it all, *EoJ* does have strategic appeal. If you're no stranger to putting together a deck and can find someone to play with, then you could well get more than your money's worth out of it. **– Nick O'Shea**

BEHOLD MY FEARSOME BEAST!

There are upsides and downsides to using a camera in an online game. While not as direct or as obvious as general webcam usage, anything that passes across the game mat will be broadcast to the other player. Our worst fear is getting the edge in a tight online game of *EoJ*, only to have the opponent use his turn to summon up the 'Twin Manberries of Revulsion'. Not really the 'pocket monster' we had in mind at all, thanks. Urgh...



■ "You sank my battleship... you filthy little minx..."



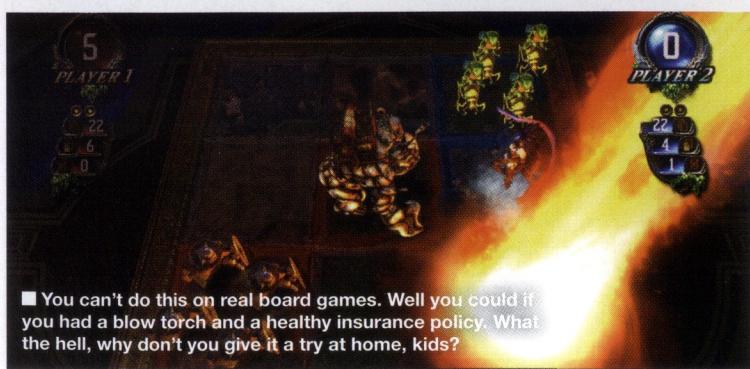
■ Those guys have enormous hands. And you know what that means ladies! I'm talkin' DOWNTOWN!



■ "We bow before thee, oh mighty Elephant of Justice..."

INFO BYTE

When *The Eye of Judgement* was initially unveiled, Sony bigwig Phil Harrison played a card featuring his trademark rubber ducky. Could this be a super rare card that you can find in booster packs?



■ You can't do this on real board games. Well you could if you had a blow torch and a healthy insurance policy. What the hell, why don't you give it a try at home, kids?

PROS:

- Considerable strategic depth
- Technological innovation

CONS:

- Quite an expensive bundle
- Lacks broad appeal

VERDICT:

Impressive tech, but *The Eye of Judgement* is still just a \$160 card game.

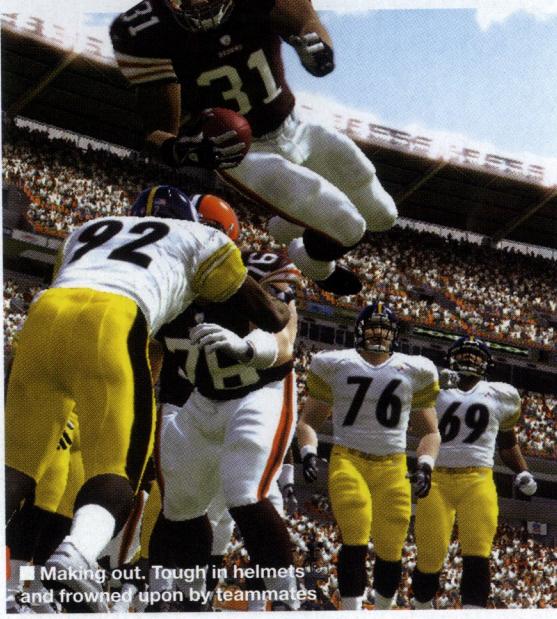
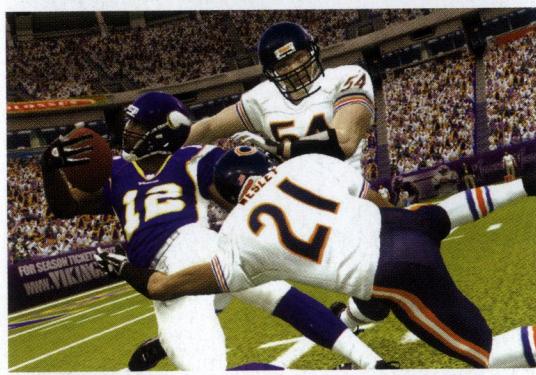
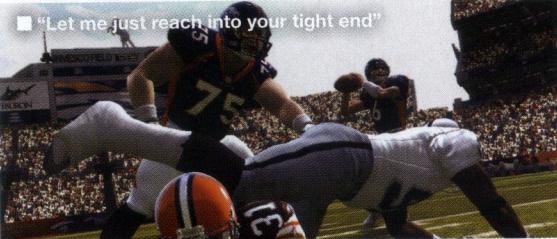
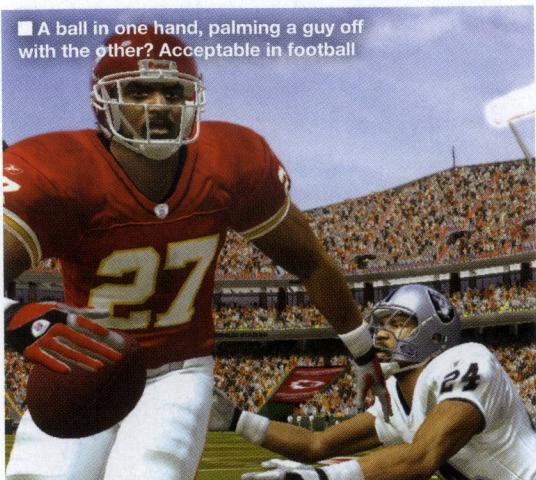
OFFICIAL SCORE:
05

■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: TIBURON
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-4
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.ea.com

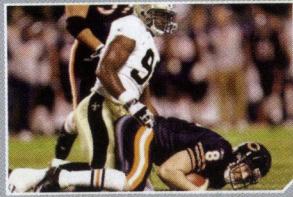
■ BACK STORY: *Madden NFL* is one of the industry's longest-running franchises, first released in 1989. There are plenty of gamers in the USA who describe their hobby as 'Madden', not 'videogames', because they just don't play anything else.

PS3 PS2 PSP
REVIEW



FOOTBALL FREAKS

American Football is the most popular sport in the USA. Traditionally, high school games are played on Friday night (often filling the schools' 10,000-seat stadia), college games on Saturday night and professional games on Sunday night (college and pro games typically draw between 50,000 and 100,000 spectators). A game is officially only 60 minutes long (four quarters of 15 minutes duration) but the frequent stoppages and team changes mean most games take over three hours to complete. The Superbowl, played in January each year, is the most-watched TV event in the United States.



MADDEN NFL 08

At last, a *Madden* worthy of the PS3

Madden NFL 08 feels like the first 'true' next gen *Madden*, as it incorporates some neat new features made possible by the PS3's horsepower. Last year's version felt more like a PS2 game with improved graphics, but although this year's version ups the visual ante again the game only runs at 30 frames per second, not the 60fps many were hoping for. That said, the animations and character models are great (even if they're not as smooth as they could be).

In fact, one of the game's big advances is its branching animation system. You can pull out of one move and go straight into another without the

first animation having to be completed – so you can jink and tackle and run more smoothly than ever before. And the number of animations is huge, so it's unlikely you'll be seeing the same tackles and catches over and over.

In play, *Madden* 08's main innovation is the 'weapon' system. Weapon players have a ranking over 90 in their specialty and receive a named ability, like 'smart quarterback' (reads defensive plays), 'spectacular catch receiver' (self explanatory) and 'big hitter' (ditto). You can assign defenders, pick routes in attack and even search for 'weapon mismatches' to give you an advantage.

These options all add strategic depth and you can use as many or as few as you like, which allows you to approach the game at its own pace.

There are a couple of other nice tweaks. 'Receiver spotlight' allows the defensive team to target a specific receiver – at the risk of picking the wrong man and allowing a different receiver to make easy yards. The other big improvement is 'Hit Stick 2.0', which now allows you to select a high or a low tackle, depending on your defensive situation at the time.

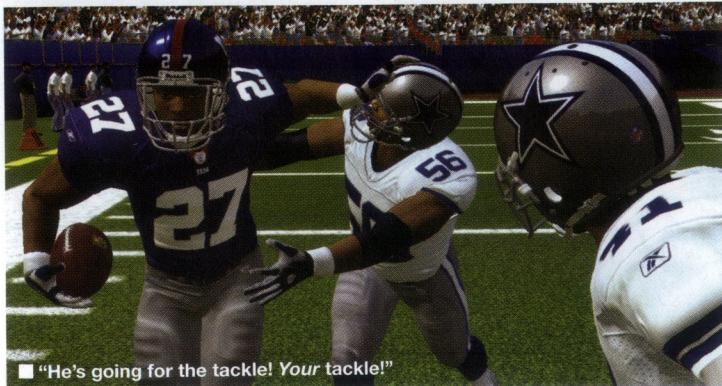
Offence and defence are well covered but special (kicking) teams continue to be

overlooked. Kick-offs, goal kicks, etc. all remain unaddressed. Touchbacks are very common and the receiving team can't call plays – these are basic flaws and it's way past time they were addressed.

The game offers plenty in the way of tutorials and game modes, though the tutorials are limited to the new or revised features only. Finance mode, superstar mode, fantasy mode and more all await if you want your NFL experience to be more sim-like, and they all add substantial value to the overall package.

Multiplayer support is provided for up to four players locally, but only two (i.e. one-on-one) online, with no support for leagues. This is a big disappointment and is such an obvious and logical addition that its omission is quite surprising.

Despite this, *Madden* NFL 08 remains a gorgeous game with plenty of tweaks, but it looks like we'll have to wait until next year (at least) to see special teams and online play finally get the attention they deserve. **Michael Butler**



■ "He's going for the tackle! Your tackle!"

INFO BYTE

You can't touch another player's helmet, mask or head generally, but apart from that, anything goes in an NFL tackle. No wonder they wear all that padding...

PROS:

- 'Weapon' system
- Branching animations

CONS:

- Special teams and online play have been neglected

VERDICT:

Some great improvements and plenty of modes, but not without a few omissions.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: NEXT LEVEL GAMES
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: spiderman-friend-or-foe.com

■ BACK STORY: Spider-Man games can go either way. The movie based titles were good, if frustrating. *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* has been the best so far – and Spidey was only a selectable character. Will this new adventure fare any better or will Spidey remain a tool in spandex?

■ "Ooh! Hahah! Titter... Spidey! Stop it, that tickles!"



SPIDER-MAN: FRIEND OR FOE

Spider-Man, Spider-Man does a limited number of things a spider can...

Sharp-eyed readers out there, the true believers who read this tidy tome from cover to cover, will notice recently there have been some complaints that the PS2 reviews are rather thin on the ground. This is because – and hold onto your hats here, it's a difficult concept to grasp – there have been few good PS2 releases of late. In fact, with the exception of, say, *Rogue Galaxy* it's all been veering towards the edge of Shit Cliff as opposed to Awesome Valley.

STRONG WORDS, MONKEY BOY

Indeed they are. Strong words from a strong yet humble man. Now we're not going to peg tennis balls at your heads and tell you, "It's just funny hail" (that trick only works on Naz after he drinks too much "Jesus Juice") – the PS2 had some of the best moments in gaming: *God*

of War, *God of War II*, pretty much any *Grand Theft Auto* you care to mention, the *Final Fantasy* series (we'll just pretend the *Dirge of Cerberus* didn't happen. Kay?), and others too numerous to mention in two pages.

But of late we've had to deal with games that are either crappy, designed for a different system (enough with the melon farming Wii ports!) or just a smidge above average. And it's with that latter category that we introduce you to *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe*.

"OH LOOK – COMIC BOOK NERD'S GOING TO SAY SOMETHING NERDY. THE BIG NERD!"

Comic book creators love one thing: team-ups [NEEEERD! – Ed], you know; Spider-Man and Daredevil, Hulk and Wolverine, Batman and Superman and,

oh, who knows? Venom and your mother.

The usual story is that former enemies – or grudging friends – are forced to join forces against an even more evil foe. It happens all the times in the funny books and we had it to an extent with *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* (still a kick arse PS3 title and likely cheap if you know where to look) and *Justice League Heroes* – but that was all goodies fighting fist to foot with other goodies. Where's the fun and drama in that?

"MY GOD THE NERD-O-METER'S GOING TO EXPLODE!"

The plot in *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe* is fairly incidental. Someone's taking all the heroes and villains. Hence team-up time. Okay, it's not going to win a Pulitzer – but it's a solid(ish) base from which you can build plot twists, back stabs and

unexpected cameos from obscure heroes or villains.

Unfortunately we got all of that in *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*. *Friend or Foe* on the other hand believes brevity is not only the source of wit, but also a good story.

They're wrong but they had a, well, solid try at it.

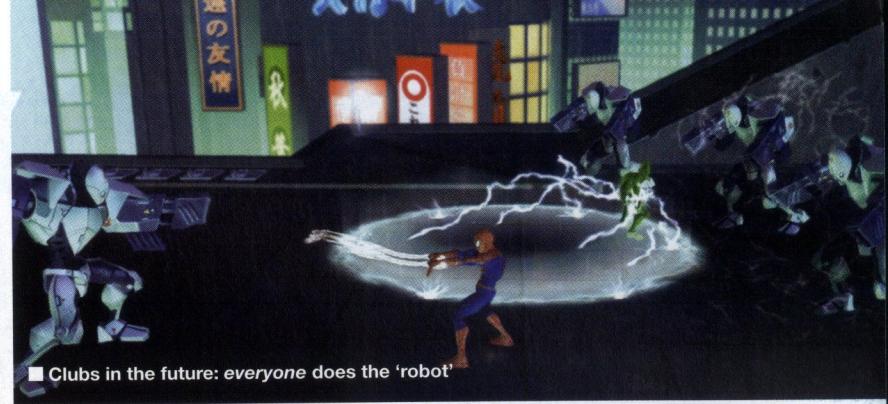
HOW'S IT LOOK? WELL... IT'S GOT A "GOOD PERSONALITY"

This isn't *Spider-Man 2* (PS2) or even *Spider-Man 3* (PS3), the characters in *Friend or Foe* are more cartoonish and exaggerated. They're an odd mix of movie look-a-likes and comic book creations with a bit of anime chucked in the mix.

Another stylistic erm... "decision" was to make it top down, rendering Spidey's best, and most visually stunning skill: web-swinging – almost completely



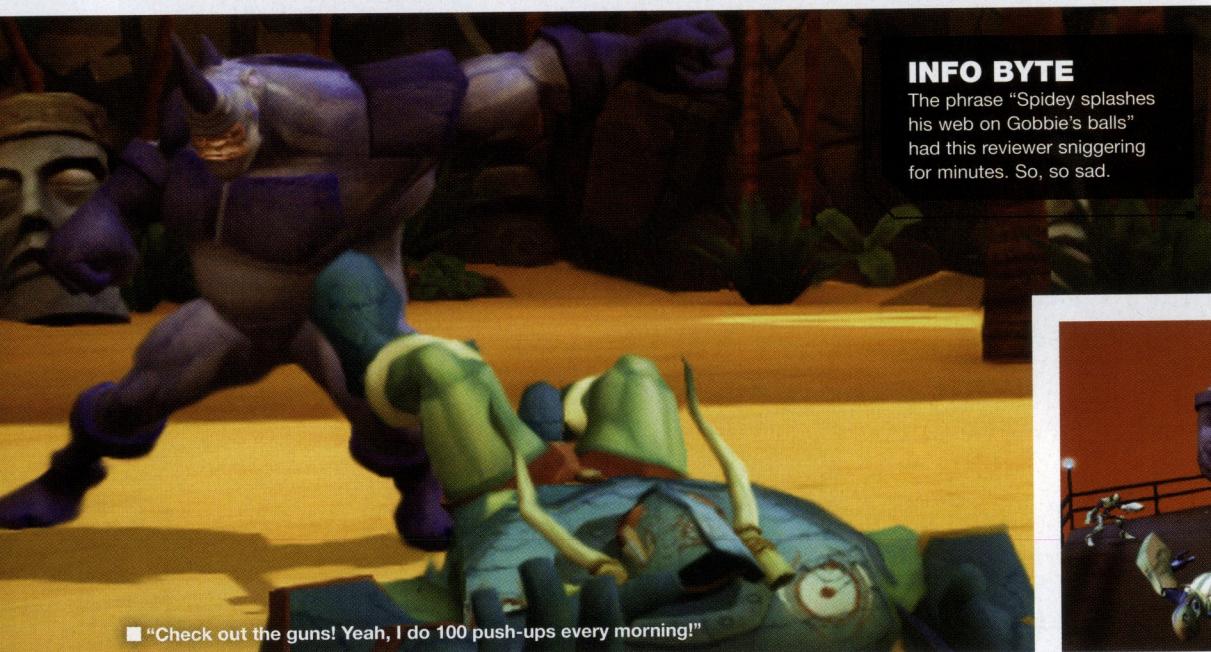
■ "Give me you lunch money now!" Spider-Man was a big bully in superhero high school...



■ Clubs in the future: everyone does the 'robot'



■ Tug of war: a lot less painful if you use your hands...



■ "Check out the guns! Yeah, I do 100 push-ups every morning!"

redundant. Oh sure, you can do it - like you could in *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* - but you get the kind of height where you might clear a gutter or small dog. "Leaps several daschunds in single web-swing!" Nup. That's not going to cut it.

OKAY, BUT DOES SHE GO?

Much more impressive are Spidey's other web uses. The *Spider-Man* movie tie-ins never really got that Peter Parker's webs can be used as cool weapons and not just as a means of hooning across New York without stepping in dog poo. In *Friend or Foe* the webbed one can grab a foe, fling him through the air, slam him on the ground, pick him back up again, swing him around and hurl him into his bad guy buddies. It's pretty cool fun... for a while. But we'll get to that in a second.

YOU'VE GOTTA TO HAVE... FR-IEENDS

Note how we mentioned the team-ups before? Well, this Spidey adventure is full of them. Naturally Spider-Man is the main erm... man. But you can pick a bunch of sidekicks - all of whom can be played by a second player - props for that - before you start each level. Cohorts include Venom, Green Goblin, Doctor Octopus and, look, Sandman, Black Cat, Scorpion - basically every A-list member of Spidey's rogue's gallery is here.

WE'RE SENSING A BIG "BUT" COMING...

BUT the real problem with *Friend or Foe* is that apart from the bosses at the end of each of the four part stages - the enemies come in three varieties.

Small, medium and large. Oh sure on the mechanical level they've been rendered as robots and on the jungle levels they look more like sort of evil monkey foetuses - but ultimately you're punching, kicking and throwing your web at the same folks for the whole game. It gets tedious after two levels, skull-crackingly boring after three and then, before you know it, you've finished the game. You won't have invested much time in the venture - but it will feel like wasted time.

WOW. YOU REALLY WENT WOLVERINE ON THIS!

"It's *Spider-Man* for kids!" is the marketing ploy for this just... average title. But that's a load of crap. Kids can play oodles of better games on all of the PlayStation systems. No, it's sad but *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe* is no friend of ours. There's a decent two-player versus mode thrown into the mix but it's a case of too little too late. Some games just make you want to crash-tackle nuns. **Anthony O'Connor**

PROS:

- Colourful characters
- A bit like *LEGO Star Wars...*

CONS:

- ...only not as charming
- Doesn't add anything new

VERDICT:

Spider-Man: Friend or Foe is like a steak you've barely put on the barbie. Underdone.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
05

■ GENRE: PLATFORMER
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: SIERRA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: VIVENDI

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$49.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.spyrothedragon.com

■ BACK STORY: *Eternal Night* carries on the storyline from *New Beginning* which concluded with the defeat of Cynder, the lieutenant of a mysterious "Dark Master". Now the Ape King has reared his ugly head and plans to resurrect said Dark Master.

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: THE ETERNAL NIGHT

Purple: the colour of weaklings, and impossible to rhyme with...

Being purple is not conducive to being a bad arse. If anything, when someone designs you purple it's a conscious effort to knock you down a few pegs testosterone-wise. A fine example of this is Barney; he's a T-rex that they coloured purple and as a result he developed a burning need to teach basic arithmetic to small children, as opposed to biting their heads clean off – which would have been his natural response. Similarly, there's Grimace; the guy used to start fights and was a notorious womaniser – until McDonalds made him a purple pansy, then he got depression, put on the kgs, and now his face is forever frozen in an idiotic grimace. With all this overwhelming evidence, you'd wonder how Spyro is faring with recent attempts to make him "edgier".

For those of you returning to Spyro from the PSone days, you may be shocked to see that the experience has been geared towards combat. Spyro now has fury attacks, upgradeable breaths and ground-to-air melee combos that you'll need to use against large swarms of enemies – which is a noticeable shift away from the collectable kleptomaniac antics of the originals. Enemies now come at you in vast swarms and to make your assault on them easier Spyro can now level up his abilities, and a byproduct of unleashing these maxed out maneuvers are some tidy looking graphical effects.

Another new ability introduced in *The Eternal Night* is dragon time, and it was included because every game nowadays "needs" a bullet time mechanic. It basically does what you think it does;

it slows down enemies to give you a combat edge and it's also used to solve the occasional "ridiculously-fast-closing-door" puzzle. We're surprised/ashamed to confess this; but even with these new abilities things got challenging, and a few times we found ourselves overwhelmed by the onslaught.

Controversially, this new version of Spyro is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand we can respect the developers for making a genuine effort to fix the widely criticized monotony of *A New Beginning*, and on the other hand the combat-intensive solution to the problem may alienate all the existing Spyro fans who still just want to collect a ridiculous amount of things and head butt the occasional sheep or frog.

No matter which side of the Spyro fence you stand on, *The Eternal Night* is quite a respectable game in its own right, and while it doesn't reinvent sliced bread it's easily more enjoyable than its predecessor. But what surprises us most of all is Spyro defying the odds and managing to have a touch of attitude this time around – despite the huge disadvantages of being purple and having Elijah Woods' voice. **Adam Mathew**

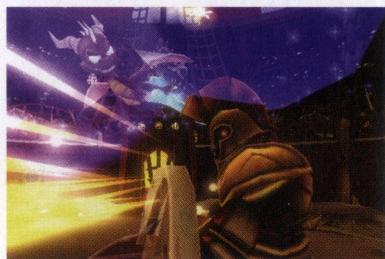
CHOICE VOICE

This new Spyro has some exceptionally good voice work provided by some big budget movie actors and notable voice talent. The actors and some of their more memorable works are as follows: Spyro is played by Elijah Wood (*Frodo Baggins: LOTR*), Sparx is played by the inimitable Billy West (*Stimp: Ren & Stimpy*, *Zap Brannigan: Futurama*), Terrador is voiced by Kevin Michael Richardson (*Goro: Mortal Kombat*, *Tartarus: Halo 2*) and Ignitus is done by Gary Oldman (*Sirius Black: Harry Potter*).



INFO BYTE

This should make you feel old and crusty: There have been over 12 official Spyro games released since Spyro in 1998.



PROS:

- Less boring than before
- Tidy graphical effects

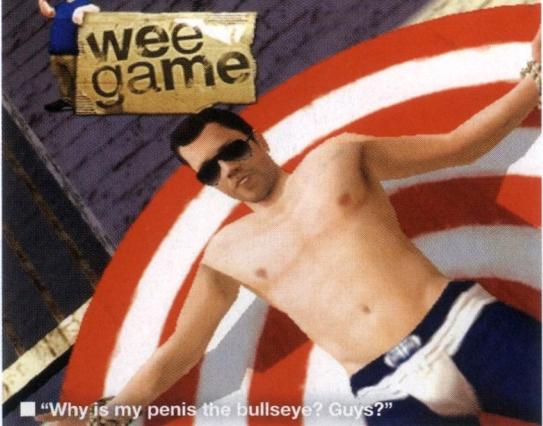
CONS:

- Overly difficult for the kids
- New gameplay may alienate

VERDICT:

Not a massive evolution but it definitely puts the series back on track.

OFFICIAL
SCORE:
07



■ "Why is my penis the bullseye? Guys?"

■ GENRE: PARTY
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: SIDHE INTERACTIVE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: FUNTASTIC

■ PLAYERS: 1-8
■ PRICE: \$49.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.jackassthegame.com



■ "My unborn children!"

JACKASS: THE GAME

Mel Gibson has a house in Mianus?

One of the main caveats of *Jackass* is don't try this at home. Now you can, thanks to *Jackass: The Game*. But should you bother?

A quick-fix selection of around 35 minigames, *Jackass: The Game* tries to capture the energy of the show. It gets part of the way there thanks to some great presentation but falters due to far too many forgettable stunts.

Success can earn you a bunch of unlocks, including clips from the show like Johnny's trip to Mianus, Connecticut – which is all-time ("There's a little Jack Russell Terrier in Mianus!"). However, you'd probably be better off picking up the DVDs if that's what you're really after.

Not too surprisingly, *Jackass: The Game* features a credible punk soundtrack to accompany the zany action, including pre-eminent punk legends like LA's Circle Jerks and New Jersey's The Misfits.

The biggest problem with it, unfortunately, is that there just aren't enough minigames you'll return to. Our

favourites were limited to the ones where the aim is to injure your jackass as much as possible. You're given a breakdown on-screen as the injuries occur, and we'll admit it's impossible to stifle a smile when "Bruised Left Testicle" pops onto screen, sandwiched between "Torn Scrotum" and "Rug Burn". Simple, irreverent and silly – but hardly essential. **• Luke Reilly**

PROS:

- Man fall down, funny
- Not a terrible diversion

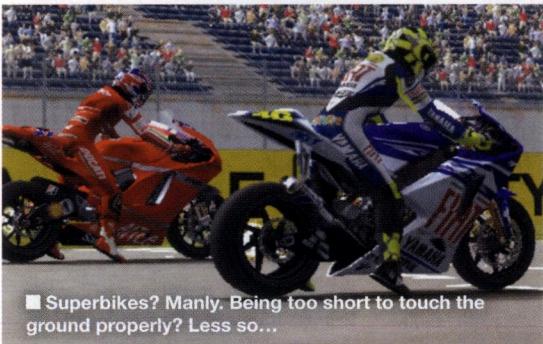
CONS:

- Not much substance
- Underwhelming visuals

OFFICIAL SCORE:

05

VERDICT: Succeeds in being entertaining in bursts, but there's not enough meat on the bones.



■ Superbikes? Manly. Being too short to touch the ground properly? Less so...

■ GENRE: RACING
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: MILESTONE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$79.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.milestone.it



MOTO GP 07

Back in the saddle...

If you're like us, every once in a while you get an irresistible urge to throw your leg over something and ride really fast. Failing that, we've found that motorcycles or the MotoGP games can be pleasant diversions also. With four successful MotoGP games already out on the circuit, the ownership of the series has been shifted from the capable hands of Namco to Capcom, new owners of the rights to "the world's fastest, balls on the road sporting event" – its words, not ours.

Capcom has entrusted the task to Milestone, developers of the surprisingly good *SBK07*, and the results are easily on par with the Namco efforts. The game features variable difficulty which can be

set to what we like to call *Super Hang On* mode or an über-realistic simulation mode. *MotoGP 07* offers a definite sense of speed when you're pushing the limit to shave some crucial seconds off your lap – and a definite sense of pain when you cock up and shave some crucial layers of skin off your rider. And yes, the first person view is as vomit-inducing as ever.

While the game is a decent effort it doesn't offer many improvements. We were hoping a new developer would translate into fresh innovations, but it seems most of the effort was spent replicating the Namco experience. That said, Capcom has laid some good solid groundwork here and we're keen to see a next gen offering. **• Adam Mathew**



■ "It's raining... men? No, just water. Sigh!"

PROS:

- Accessible yet challenging
- Impressive sense of velocity

CONS:

- Doesn't really improve that much on Namco's offerings

OFFICIAL SCORE:

07

VERDICT: Keeps an easy pace with the Namco series, but doesn't overtake it.

PS3 PS2 PSP
REVIEW

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: KOEI
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$69.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.koei.com/whoisorochi



WARRIORS OROCHI

Let us kill endless waves of samey-looking enemies!

You know, if you're odd enough to admit you're a *Dynasty Warriors* fan – and we know there's about eleven of you out there – you'll probably want to have a gander at this here title.

The plot concerns Orochi, The Serpent King, lobbing down to this mortal plane for no other reason than to chew bubblegum and kick arse. And he's all out of bubblegum.

Cue dense story arcs that start with three kingdoms and break down into you being able to play up to 77 characters. Plus you can make your weapons do different stuff. If only these games weren't so bloody repetitive we'd be telling you that every home should have one.

Unfortunately the first hour of hacking dudes in yellow duds is no more exciting than the sixth hour of hacking dudes in red duds. Like we said, *DW* die-hards will lap this average fare up, so, hardcore fans – you know who you are – feel free to get on this. It's at a nice price. Everyone else should duck and cover and pray for no more. **■ Anthony O'Connor**

PROS:

- *DW* fans will be happier than a baby in a barrel full of titties

CONS:

- Gets boring faster than a curry tears through your colon

VERDICT: If the same few seconds of action repeated impresses the shit out of you; buy up!

OFFICIAL SCORE:
05



PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ DEVELOPER: HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: AFA INTERACTIVE
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ PRICE: \$59.95



BEN 10 PROTECTOR OF EARTH

It's the Mars Bar quick energy Chocobot hour...

For those of you unfamiliar with the cartoon *Ben 10*, the plot revolves around unlikely hero Ben Tennyson and his watch contraption the Omnitrix, which allows him to transform into weird alien forms each with super abilities. Capitalising on this tailor made game character mechanic, the gameplay is basically *Crash of the Titans*.

That being said *Ben 10* is an action game aimed at youngsters, meaning the controls and combo systems are

simplified. The fighting system uses three types of attacks: light, heavy, and special moves for each unique form. Though the game is geared towards combat, you'll tackle the occasional puzzle element in each of the 14 levels that usually just requires a particular form to solve.

It's a paint-by-numbers game that isn't the best or worst of its type and while it's simplistic for the majority, it could respectfully rescue your ankles from teeth marks. **■ Adam Mathew**

PROS:
■ Emulates the cartoon well
■ Crisp, cel-shaded style

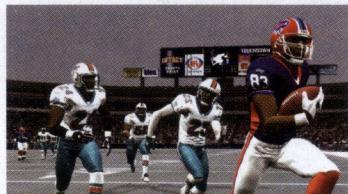
CONS:
■ Co-op would've helped
■ Yawn...

VERDICT: Enjoyable enough but very pedestrian. For the undiscerning younglings only.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
05

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ DEVELOPER: TIBURON
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ PRICE: \$69.95



MADDEN NFL 08

Going downhill... fast

Gridiron's about taking other people's land by force and wearing tight pants while you do it. This being the case, we thought it'd be impossible to make the formula stale; until we played *Madden 08*. It's not that it was crap, it was just a lazy incremental release with a roster change and little else of merit.

The biggest addition this year is the 'weapon' system which allows better visualisation of star players. You can

quickly recognise which players are good interceptors, who packs the speed, and who is keen for some illegal dogfighting after the game. While it's helpful for newbies, it's useless for enthusiasts who already know the steroid dosages of every player in the league.

We challenge EA to an evolutionary race. Imbue *Madden* with some significant improvements before we can evolve our goldfish into a human. Our money's on Mr. Bubbles. **■ Adam Mathew**

PROS:
■ Still plays well
■ Still looks good

CONS:
■ Still hasn't evolved much
■ Next gen it isn't

VERDICT: We expected this to give 07 a well deserved sacking – but it didn't really happen.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07



playstation.com.au

eyeofjudgment.com



THE EYE OF JUDGMENT™

Your cards hold the power and the PlayStation® Eye is the key to unleash it. Plan your strategy, bide your time and strike when unexpected. Watch the creatures rise and attack before your eyes in the ultimate 3D battle. The Eye of Judgment's decision is final.

PG

Mild themes,
mild fantasy
and violence



Expand your collection with additional booster packs.



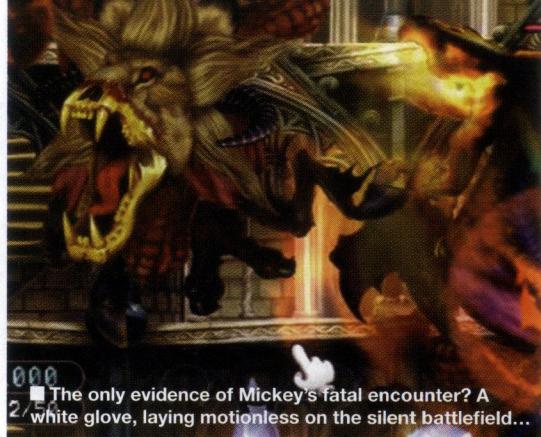
This is living

PLAYSTATION 3

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: VANILLWARE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$69.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.nisamerica.com/games



■ The only evidence of Mickey's fatal encounter? A white glove, laying motionless on the silent battlefield...

GRIMGRIMOIRE

Interesting that they put GRIM in the title (a subtle warning perhaps?)

It's a long held wisdom that real-time strategy games rarely work on consoles. We've been berated in the past for saying so, but there's just something about their plodding nature that just doesn't suit. We'd love to now say: "But here's the exception!" but, to be blunt, it's more like further evidence of the initial assertion.

Okay the plot: In a sort of weird Japanese version of Hogwarts young Lillet Blan joins the wizard's school with the rather fruity name of: Tower of Silver Star. Something horrible has happened in the last five days (hint: everybody dies) and, using magic, a map, elves and pixies you have to find out what caused it.

We've probably lost most of you already, and frankly that's not really a bad thing. *GrimGrimoire* will take you about 45 minutes to get to the action and that's even skipping the endless talky talky.

To rub salt in your waiting wound you don't even do your own fighting. Also, all of the game's battles take place on one map – so variety isn't exactly abundant.

This is just not very good. It's been well-received elsewhere, but so was Nazism in the '30s (and look what happened).

If you want to play an interesting game with a genuinely fascinating mystery Folklore awaits. This *Groundhog Day* meets weird Japanese RPG meets RTS is just... we don't want to talk about it anymore. **▲ Anthony O'Connor**

PROS:

- Magic is cool... right?
- RTS geeks will probably love it

CONS:

- Cute, slow and derivative
- It's not a very good game

VERDICT: *GrimGrimoire* had a neat idea but became a pig's arse somewhere along the way.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

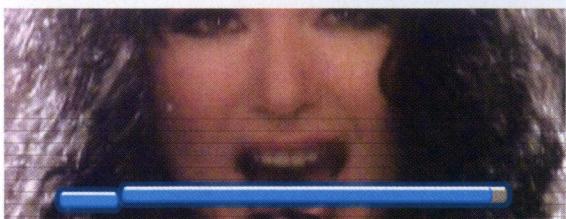
04



PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: PARTY
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: SONY
■ DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

■ PLAYERS: 1-8
■ PRICE: \$49.95/\$99.95
■ HD: 576i
■ WEB: www.singstargame.com



■ Meat Loaf. You can't eat him

cool!
P1 P2
cool!
P1 P2
And I would do a- ny- thing for love
But I won't do - that

SINGSTAR ROCK BALLADS

"Just like every cowboy sings his sad, sad song – every rose has its thorn"

Another month, another *SingStar*. *Rock Ballads* certainly isn't the worst one yet (that honour belongs to *SingStar Anthems*) but it isn't among the best of the range either.

Typically, it remains the same game as always and there have been no adjustments to any of the game modes.

Unfortunately, *Rock Ballads* stumbles early. It does, admittedly, feature a handful of highlights – a couple of super-daggy tracks that truly shine above the others. We're talking specifically of 'More Than A Feeling' by Boston, 'Africa' by Toto, 'Broken Wings' by Mr Mister and 'I Just Died In Your Arms Tonight' by Cutting Crew. There are a few other passable

ditties but, for ours, the bulk of what's on offer is blander than a tofu smoothie. The range of songs certainly satisfy all the necessary requirements for a solid singing experience, but the problem is that *Rock Ballads* really is at odds with its own name. Typically a rock, or power, ballad is an emotional arena rock track – a real, lighter-raising crowd-pleaser. If we had to

pick a crop of genuine loin-stirring power ballads, Tina Arena, Jon Secada, Avril Lavigne and Sugababes(!) wouldn't be on our list. Journey, Bon Jovi, Guns 'N Roses and KISS would.

We tuned out when we couldn't find 'Don't Stop Believin'', 'Always', 'November Rain' or 'God Gave Rock 'n Roll To You'. That is all. **▲ Luke Reilly**

PROS:

- Does the job
- 'Africa' by Toto. Classic

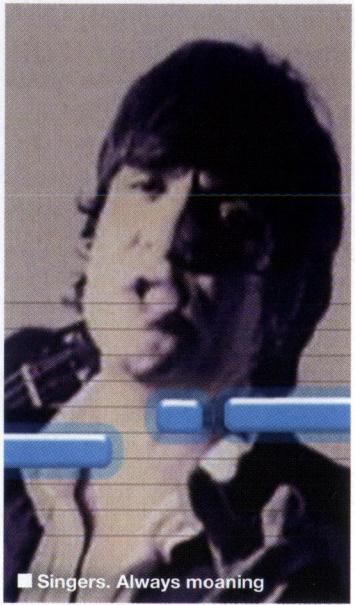
CONS:

- Nickelback, Sugababes, et al.
- Not many true rock ballads

VERDICT: *Rock Ballads* seems to have gone wide of the mark. Some killer, mostly filler.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

06



■ Singers. Always moaning

■ DEVELOPER: JUICE GAMES
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ PRICE: \$69.95

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW



JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

Vanity license plate number: ORDNRY

Bankruptcy nearly prevented the release of the original *Juiced* game which would have been quite a shame because it offered up some respectable competition for the *Need for Speed* franchise. Similarly, this upstart sequel mimics arch rival *ProStreet*, by fashioning itself on the blinged up legitimized street racing circuit too.

The game still offers obsessive compulsive car customisations of 90 vehicles, drift/circuit racing and race

betting. The two major upgrades this time are a "Driver DNA" system that analyses your driving traits then replicates it as AI, and a 50 layer customisable decal system. Sweet.

But even with these new features *Juiced 2* comes off as just another standard street racer and it's unforgivable that PS2 owners got seriously shafted by a lack of any online options. Here's our impression of the whole experience in one word: "Meh". **Adam Mathew**

PROS:
■ Engaging action
■ Decent music and models

CONS:
■ Online multiplayer?
■ Cheaty AI opponents

VERDICT: Middle of the road racer with sub standard stripped down features.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

PROS:
■ Combos are satisfying
■ Improved load times

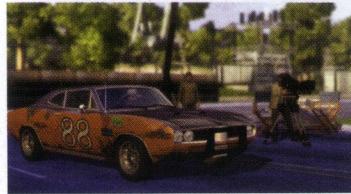
CONS:
■ Trial and error gameplay can become tedious...

VERDICT: It's ice cream for perfectionists and a big bowl of repetition for anyone else.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07

■ DEVELOPER: PARADIGM
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ PRICE: \$69.95

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW



STUNTMAN: IGNITION

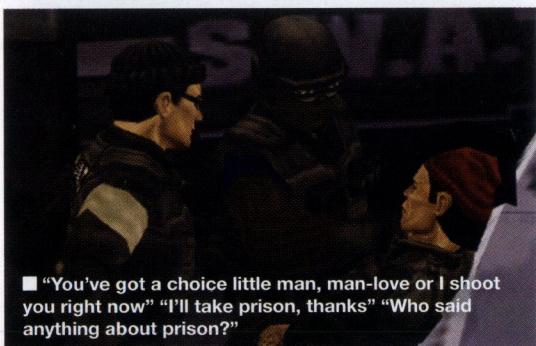
Remember that movie *Hooper*? Lucky you...

Chicks dig scars, and if you manage to get yourself looking like Mel Gibson did in *The Man Without a Face*, you'll be beating away the skirt with a stick. Identifying this universal formula for coolness Paradigm has decided to resurrect the daredevil antics of 2002's *Stuntman* with a new sequel.

Following the premise of the original, Paradigm has avoided most of the pitfalls of the original. Unfortunately some problems still remain, most notably the

frustration caused by the repetitive trial-and-error gameplay.

The experience isn't without its charms though; the vehicle handling is intuitive, the challenges and environments are explosive and varied, and the game features awesome stereotypical pinstripes of Hollywood flicks like 'Never Kill Me Again'. Essentially, *Ignition* is a solid game that is a hell of a lot more approachable than its predecessor. Definitely worth a spin. **Adam Mathew**



"You've got a choice little man, man-love or I shoot you right now" "I'll take prison, thanks" "Who said anything about prison?"

GENRE: TACTICAL SHOOTER
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
DEVELOPER: 3G STUDIOS
DISTRIBUTOR: VIVENDI

PLAYERS: 1-4
PRICE: \$69.95
GAMESHARE: YES
WEB: www.swatpsp.com/us

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW



SWAT: TARGET LIBERTY

Oh those silly terrorists! When will they ever learn?

To be honest we didn't have much hope for *SWAT: Target Liberty*. It looked like a poor man's version of the pretty-but-way-too-hard *Killzone: Liberation*. Imagine our delight when this tactical shooter actually turned out to be pretty damn good.

Terrorists are swarming like cockroaches over New York. Your customisable SWAT team must subdue them. Often subduing them full of lead.

At the same time you have to arrest or restrain civilians and you even get to interrogate cowardly baddies. You can play co-op and an impressive option is the multiplayer 'Kill-House' generator where a random map is created, thus

giving the players, theoretically, endless hours of shootin' fun.

On the downside the action can get a little stale, especially if you're playing alone. However, with a friend you'll be breaching and clearing rooms, taking out sniper's nests and generally giving those anti-American scumbags a good dose of USA-made death.

This would probably have been the best tactical shooter of the year – smart AI, interesting missions, good use of multiplayer – but we reckon *GRAW2* probably just snatched that crown. Still if you're due for a long trip somewhere, bored on a rainy day or just a lazy you could do a helluva lot worse than *SWAT*. **Anthony O'Connor**

PROS:
■ Good team dynamic
■ Good co-op and multiplayer

CONS:
■ The graphics are a bit ugly
■ *GRAW2* is a little better

VERDICT: Beneath a dull exterior lies a complex and engaging tactical shooter.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2007
■ DEVELOPER: BIGBIG STUDIOS
■ DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

■ PLAYERS: 1-4
■ PRICE: \$59.95
■ GAMESHARE: NO
■ WEB: www.pursuitforce.com

■ BACK STORY: A famous cop who constantly pissed off his police chief was Dirty Harry Callahan; a consummate anti-authoritative pursuit professional, whose hobbies included making people's days and impromptu punk rock surveys. [Huh? – Ed]

■ "You think this chopper's impressive? Check this out" (unzipping sound)



PURSUIT FORCE: EXTREME JUSTICE

Extreme justice > regular justice



The life of a professional pursuit operative is an absolute bitch. You're always out on the road (or river – which is like a wet road), they expect you to work on your wedding day (when realistically you should be "on the job" in a different capacity), and your boss continually threatens that if you get yourself killed – you'll be fired. If that isn't spectacular enough, you have to contend with competition from rival pursuit outfits with vastly cooler names who are continually trying to seagull your hard-earned arrests. Frankly, if the job didn't involve leaping between speeding vehicles and shooting people in the head – we'd probably just hit up some night fill at Woolies.

For those of you coming off a low carb, crap videogames diet; the original *Pursuit Force* was a delicious cherry of originality in a vast creamy ocean of half-arsed PS2

ports. It successfully borrowed the best parts of our favourite late-eighties arcade games, added an over-the-top *Time Crisis* plot, mixed in the blistering speed of *Burnout* and ultimately delivered an action-piss-taking, crime-busting cool game.

Extreme Justice continues two years after the previous game and features some new bad guys as well as some old cheeseball favourites that continue the camp, tongue-in-cheek humour of the original. Here's an example for the uninitiated; the Convicts gang was led by a wrecking ball fixated bloke called "Hard Balls". Nice.

Similarly you receive your orders from a stereotypically gruff chief who is a coronary waiting to happen due to the renegade antics of you and your death defying team. That's right, you are no longer an elite Nigel-no-friends law enforcement officer this time; you're given

some support in the form of Gage (Pursuit Specialist), Ash (Special Operations) and Preach (Heavy Assault). They're all fancy pants names to be sure but we're still giving the award to Hard Balls...

IT'S LIKE SYDNEY'S M5 MOTORWAY IN RUSH HOUR...

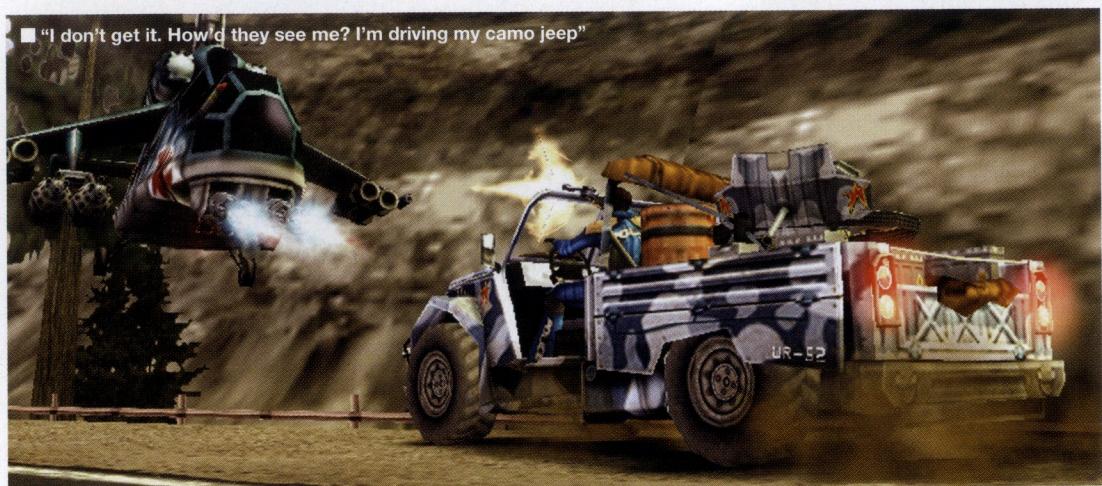
The core gameplay hasn't changed much and still has you pursuing (with force) the aforementioned villains in your police car/bike/chopper/hovercraft and either perforating or ramming them into submission. Your agent has the ability to acrobatically leapfrog out of your vehicle and onto the hoods of your enemies which then initiates a precarious shootout minigame. Once you issue the punk with some "extreme comeuppance" you can commandeer his ride, then rinse and repeat until you eventually encounter the gang's boss. This process is kept

interesting by the odd on-rails or on-foot mission, and the inclusion of the Justice Meter which is a combo system that grants you special moves, health top-ups and massive damage if you consistently neutralise your enemies efficiently.

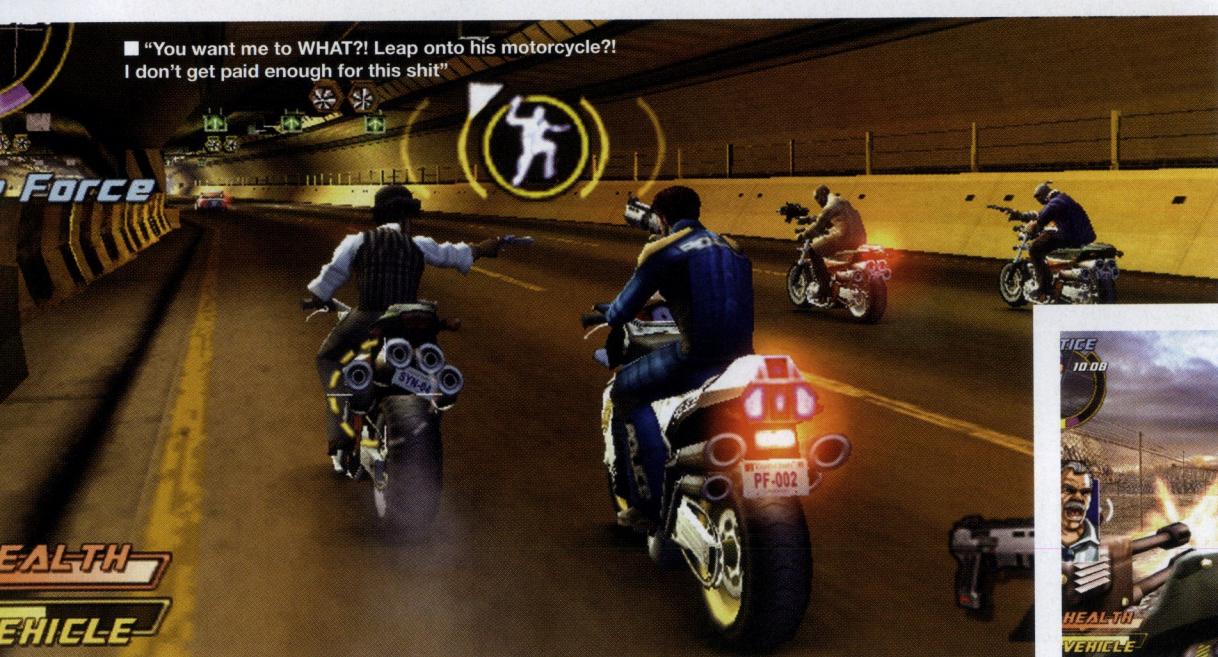
While it still features the obligatory Story mode, BigBig Studios has wisely ditched the tacked on race and time attack modes of the original and has replaced them with a Bounty mode, a Challenge mode, and a much-needed multiplayer mode. The Bounty mode is basically a score attack that has you replaying your story missions to unlock bonus shop items, while the Challenge mode includes nefarious trials that range from rather tricky to swear-jar-explodingly difficult. Both modes greatly extend the longevity of the proceedings, which shows that the developers were listening to the criticisms of *Pursuit Force*.



■ "I don't get it. How'd they see me? I'm driving my camo jeep"



■ "You want me to WHAT?! Leap onto his motorcycle?! I don't get paid enough for this shit"



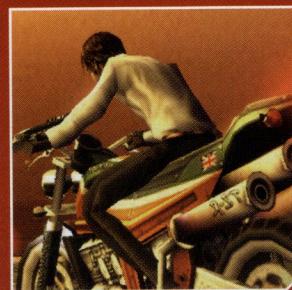
PUNKS THAT ARE FEELIN' LUCKY...

Convicts: These guys are all about mayhem and they drive vehicles out of *Mad Max*.

Warlords: Ex-USSR mercs still living the cold war dream; these slippery Cossacks pack seriously heavy weaponry.

Raiders: Rednecks who have taken their ambush tactics from the swampy bayou. They'll kill you as soon as marry their sister...

Syndicate: Dapper thieves from the UK. They have indulgent automobile tastes, expertly tailored suits and a love of warm beer.



"[challenges] that range from rather tricky to swear-jar-explodingly-difficult"

The multiplayer mode is a fantastic little diversion that supports four players ad-hoc and includes a variety of adversarial and co-operative options. The weakest link here is definitely the Rampage mode which uses the on-foot sections in a questionably-controlling deathmatch setup. Survivor mode is essentially the same gameplay as the main game but with a tonne of enemies, and there's also Ram Jam, which, as the name suggests, features armoured vehicles and more ramming action than your average porno. The pick of the litter has got to be Cops 'n Robbers, which

puts all players into either pursuers or pursues and then has you escaping or exploding one another.

ALL RIGHT TEAM - LET'S GET EXTREME...

No matter which mode you happen to be playing in *Extreme Justice*, it's hard not to recognise the high production values; whether it's in the blistering frame-rate of the chases, the impressive pre-rendered cut-scenes, or even just the dynamic menu systems. The quality continues in the audio department too with top notch sound effects, humorous voice acting

and some appropriately melodramatic music that would bring a tear of joy to Jerry Bruckheimer's eye. There is a palpable sense of effort by the developers throughout the game to preserve the existing quality of *Pursuit Force* and one-up it, and for the most part they achieve their goal.

Unfortunately the experience is still marred by some old issues left over from the first game. The on-rails shooting sections still aim awkwardly, and as we

mentioned earlier, the on-foot sections are a low point that unnecessarily slow the pace of the proceedings to a crawl. Also, we're a little pissed that the new multiplayer mode doesn't offer a game share function – which is a trifling issue (that could just be the freeloading cheapskate in us talking).

However, the good easily outweighs the bad and there's plenty to warrant a return to one of the most arresting franchises on the PSP. **Adam Mathew**

PROS:

- Rootin', tootin' fun
- Improved difficulty curve

CONS:

- On-foot sections are weak
- No freakin' gameshare

VERDICT: They've done the original "extreme" justice with this stellar sequel.

OFFICIAL SCORE:

08

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: REBELLION STUDIOS
■ DISTRIBUTOR: LUCASARTS

■ PLAYERS: 1-16
■ PRICE: \$59.95
■ GAMESHARE: NO
■ WEB: www.lucasarts.com

■ BACK STORY: LucasArts has been mining the *Star Wars* franchise for decades now, hitting upon such gaming gems as the *Battlefront* series and lightsabre-ing(?) itself in the foot with terrors like *Revenge of the Sith*.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT: RENEGADE SQUADRON

"I see your Schwartz is as big as mine..."

Set during the Empire's sinister chokehold around the universe's neck, *Renegade Squadron* is an admirably expansive third entry into the *Battlefront* series for two reasons: not only does it add another facet to the *Star Wars* canon with the epic tale of grizzled Rebel commander Col Serra and his titular Renegade Squadron (scum and villains, all of 'em), but the hard-working Jawas at Rebellion Studios have also gone to extraordinary lengths to tweak the gameplay until it's the Millenium Falcon of third-person shooters.

The primary goal of securing command posts is still the reason you're flinging lasers at the other blokes, but the class system of old has been done away with completely. No longer is there a frustratingly limited palette of

specialised classes. Instead, you're given an upper limit of 'tickets' to kit yourself out with whatever gear you so choose, with deadlier weaponry like the chaingun costing more tickets to get a hold of, putting an immediate halt to that grossly unfair jetpack-equipped, rocket-launching Wookiee you had in mind. Well, Wookiee, human, or even one of those Greedo-type things, you're now also free to design the look, race, colours and insignia of your onscreen soldier. Put simply, it's a much better system that allows for hugely flexible gameplay and personalised avatars to boot; a must if you're going to take this baby online. You really ought to too – with support for up to 16 players via ad-hoc, disputes about who really shot first in the cantina can now be settled without resorting to girlish slapping. New

weapons come in both lame (the Carbonite Freeze Gun... it freezes the opposition, but doesn't kill them) and awesome (Orbital Strike for the win!) varieties, but there's definitely something for everybody.

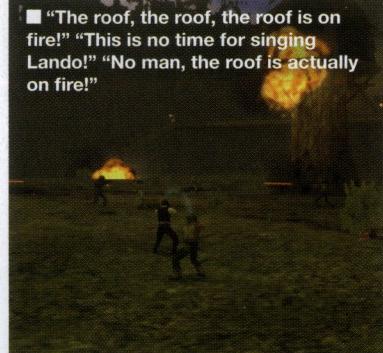
Vehicles are a lot less dominating than they were in the last two *Battlefront* games, but the balance has still yet to be struck. They're now far too brittle, making them borderline useless in multiplayer. The space missions that irked in *Battlefront II* are now a tad more bearable due to a breezy lock-on and auto-pilot system, but simultaneously a little tiresome because of exactly that. They're liberally dispersed amidst the more enjoyable ground missions during the single-player campaign, but are riddled with daring objectives to make things a little more interesting. Ultimately, the scale of *Renegade Squadron*'s conflicts might be a good deal smaller than its predecessors, but the near-faultless 'free class' system and watertight controls mean you'll be spending some quality time blasting away with Han Solo and his merry men. Er. iov! **Toby McCasker**

"BOBA FETT?!"

To keep you on your toes during the single-player campaign, every now and again (in)famous figures from *Star Wars* lore and legend will show up to stoush with you in a tense boss battle. There are a wide range of confrontations on the menu, from clashing with soulless robot bounty hunters to a frantic spaceborne duel with Boba Fett himself, and maybe even a few close encounters with some dog-kicking Dark Side aficionados too. So stay frosty, and don't say we didn't warn you.



■ "The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire!" "This is no time for singing Lando!" "No man, the roof is actually on fire!"



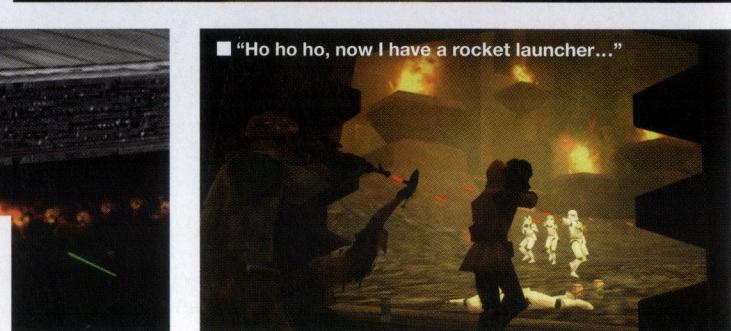
INFO BYTE

In Campaign mode it's the Alliance all the way, but elsewhere you can play as the Empire, the Clone Army, or the robotic CIS.

■ Whoom... shoom, etc.



■ "Ho ho ho, now I have a rocket launcher..."



PROS:

- Dodgy class system ditched
- Excellent single-player

CONS:

- Space battles still weak
- Easily dismembered vehicles

VERDICT:

The Force? It's damn powerful in this one, our young apprentices...

OFFICIAL SCORE:

08

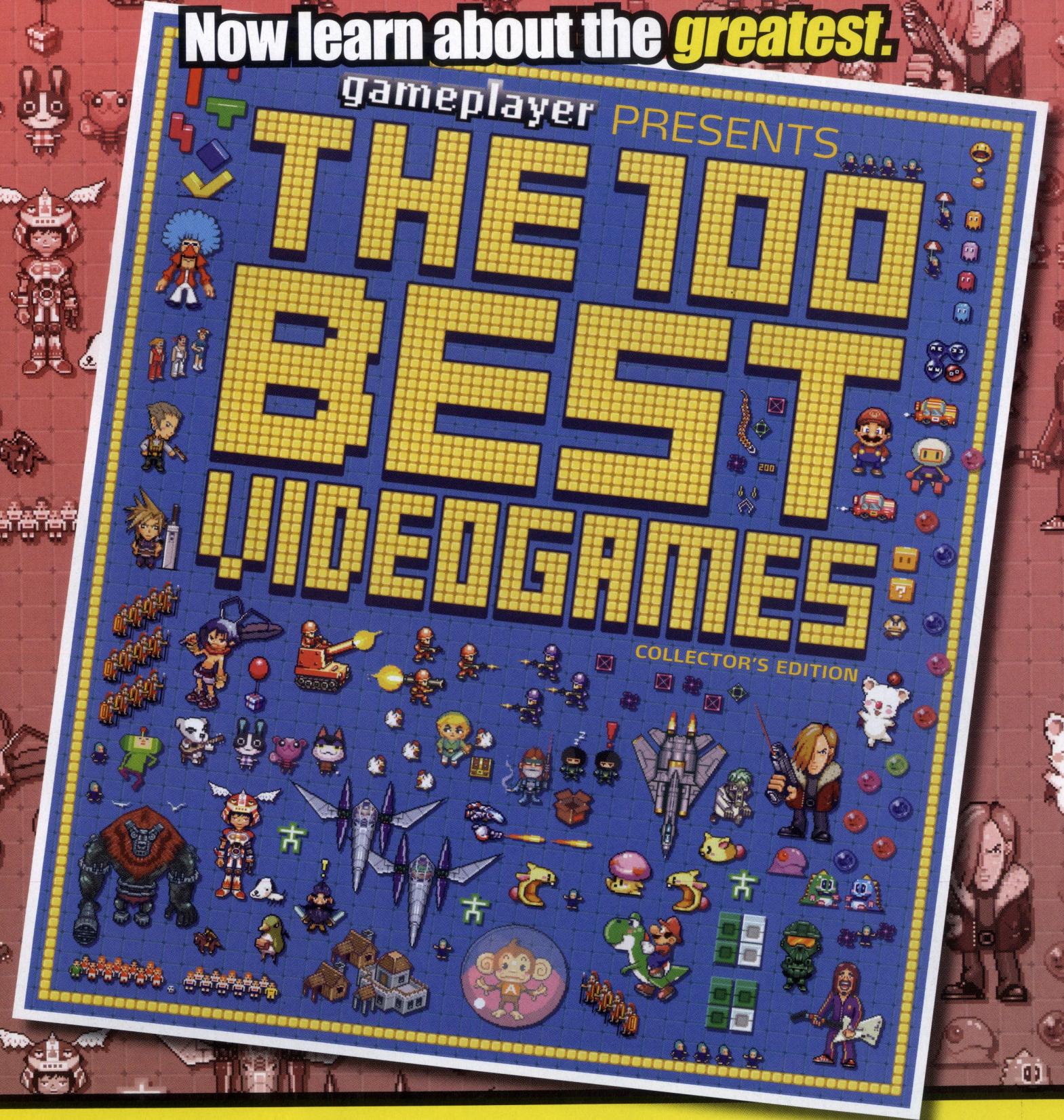
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gameplayer PRESENTS

THE 100 BEST VIDEO GAMES

COLLECTOR'S EDITION



ON SALE NOW!

■ GENRE: PLATFORMER
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$79.95
■ GAMESHARE: NO
■ WEB: www.konami.com

■ BACK STORY: The *Castlevania* series has told the story of the Belmont clan and their never-ending battle with Dracula. With more than 30 titles across various platforms over the last decade, the beloved franchise has finally come to PSP.

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES

More vampires than you can crack a whip at

As seems to be the case every 100 years, evil forces are seeking to resurrect the lord of vampires. Led by the dark priest Shaft, a cult completes a ritual of blood, bringing Dracula back to life and beginning a new age of darkness. With the legendary vampire-slaying whip in hand, Richter Belmont sets off to send Dracula and his minions back to the void they came from.

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles is literally a shot-for-shot remake of the fan favourite *Castlevania* instalment, *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood*. Similar to *Ultimate Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, *DXC* maintains the 2D gameplay of its heritage, but presents it with polished 3D visuals.

As well as the vampire hunter Richter Belmont with his sacred whip, arsenal of sub-weapons and powerful 'item crush' super moves, soon into the game you can unlock Maria Renard as a playable character – a young prodigy in the arcane arts who can summon creatures to come to her aid. Each character's different abilities not only makes for varied gameplay, but also means that some areas of the level can only be accessed

by a particular character. Each level is rife with these kinds of secrets, and there is even an alternate sequence of stages to play through, adding fantastic replay value. For a break from the main game, you can take on a progression of the stage bosses in the Boss Rush mode, either solo or in co-op play with a friend via ad-hoc play.

The *Castlevania* games are famed for their music, and *DXC* is no exception, bringing back remixed versions of the classic *Castlevania* tunes like 'Vampire Killer' and 'Bloody Tears' and packing them with wailing guitars and synthesisers. As a nice touch, you can even customise which tracks play and queue up your favourites as you see fit.

For those who don't feel that *DXC* alone is enough to make you lay the cash down, Konami has included (as unlockables) the original *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood* as well as an enhanced version of the PSone classic, *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*. This makes *DXC* a brain-snapping bargain and a very easy purchase for

long-time fans of the franchise.

The only thing you'll need to bear in mind is that with classic platforming comes classic frustration, and as you progress through the game the challenge increases markedly. There will be numerous occasions where a mistimed jump can mean instant death that will set back your progress considerably. Luckily enough, the game is fairly generous with checkpoints, continues and autosaves.

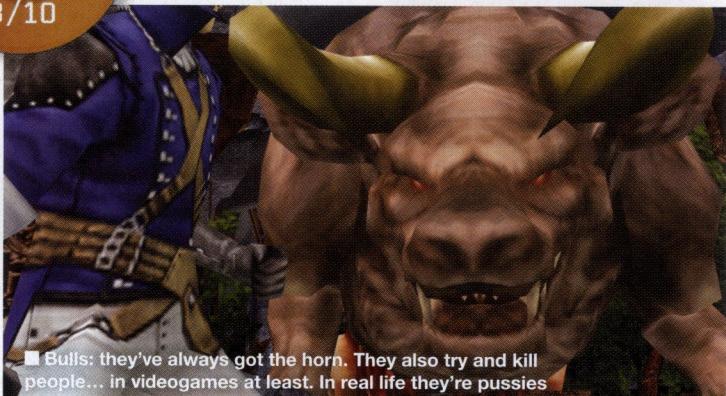
There were really never any secrets about how *Castlevania* was coming together, and as you'd expect from one of Konami's flagship franchises, it delivers on every level. Packed with value and features, this is 2D platforming at its best.

• **Nick O'Shea**

PlayStation.
Official Magazine Australia
BRONZE AWARD
8/10

BLOODY AWESOME

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles is a remake of *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood*. Despite only being released in Japan on the obscure PC Engine system, *Rondo of Blood* is often hailed by *Castlevania* fans to be the pinnacle of the side-scrolling series, even compared to the 'Metroid-vania' titles that followed. Thanks to Konami, you can check out the original *Rondo of Blood* for yourself on your PSP, as it's included in its entirety as an unlockable in *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*.



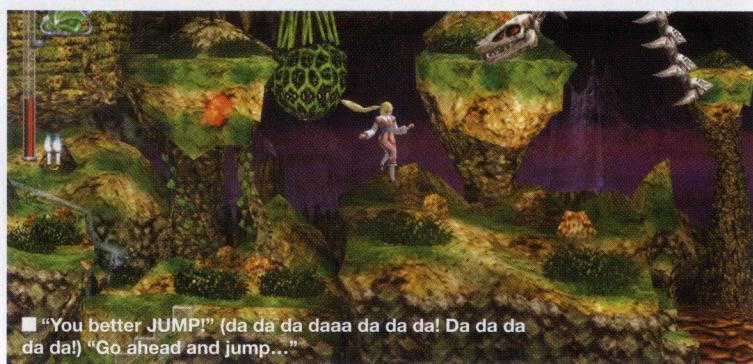
■ **Bulls:** they've always got the horn. They also try and kill people... in videogames at least. In real life they're pussies



■ Either that bird is huge or it's too close to the camera... or it's inside a doll house. Man, the possibilities are endless

INFO BYTE

The Japanese title for the series was *Akumajo Dracula*, which translates to 'Demon Castle Dracula'. Konami combined Castle with Transylvania to name it *Castlevania*.



■ "You better JUMPI!" (da da da daaa da da da! Da da da da da!) "Go ahead and jump..."



PROS:

- Classic platforming
- Amazing value

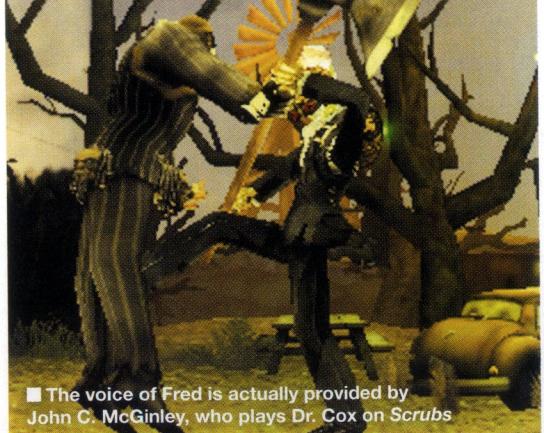
CONS:

- So it's a little dated...
- Can be a bit tough at times

VERDICT:

With fine work from Konami such as this, 2D will never die... it will always rise again.

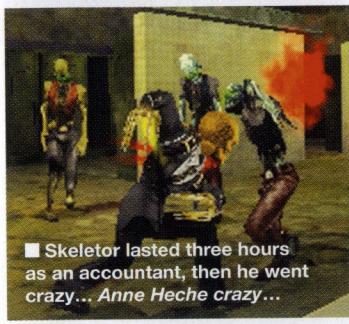
OFFICIAL SCORE:
08



The voice of Fred is actually provided by John C. McGinley, who plays Dr. Cox on *Scrubs*

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: VICIOUS CYCLE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: AFA INTERACTIVE

■ PLAYERS: 1
■ PRICE: \$59.95
■ GAMESHARE: NO
■ WEB: www.deadheadfred.net



Skeletor lasted three hours as an accountant, then he went crazy... Anne Heche crazy...

DEAD HEAD FRED

One Freddy you don't want to finger...

Everything's been done and stuff's getting strange. The last time a game was this deliciously bizarre, we were hipping and hopping over worlds of 2D weird with an oversized earthworm called Jin and a sentient booger that lived in his backpack. 'Twisted Noir', they call it, and 'twisted' is right. Only yesterday you were a private eye sniffing around a criminal kingpin's dirty laundry for that elusive piece of damning evidence, and today? Today you're dead, sans your head. But not to worry – a mad ol' scientist-type has resurrected your crusty corpse and given you a new one. Well, it's more like a pair of eyes and a brain floating in a glass tank of luminescent

green goo, but it goes alright. What's more, once you cane a particular type of enemy enough via DHF's button-mashing randomness, you can then wear their head for a completely different style of play. The dessicated zombie head, for example, sees Fred lurching and swatting at the opposition, stopping only to exhale a pall of fetid gas in their faces and

make tracks. Unfortunately, for all the off-the-wall coolness of DHF's concept and execution, this is essentially a bum-average third-person platformer with stacks of mindless tonking to go with it. A surprisingly solid camera is a bonus, but the weirdest wrapping in the world can't disguise an average adventure for long.

■ **Toby McCasker**

PROS:

- Gives great head!
- Awesome soundtrack

CONS:

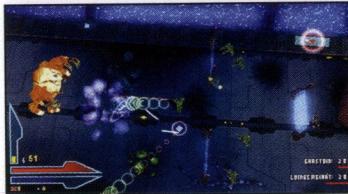
- Boring platforming
- Glitches ruin the experience

VERDICT: Fred's ahead, but only 'cause he's dead. You know what we mean...

OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

■ DEVELOPER: TOTALLY GAMES
■ DISTRIBUTOR: SEGA
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ PRICE: \$79.95

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW



ALIEN SYNDROME

Needs more James Cameron...

In *Alien Syndrome*, Sega has dusted off a Megadrive-era shooter and reworked it into an action RPG. You control Aileen Harding, a veteran space marine sent on a rescue mission into a colonisation vessel that is – big surprise – crawling with hostile aliens.

Similar to a sci-fi *Diablo*, you can customise your character's stats and abilities as well as choose from a range of weapons including lasers, shotguns and flamethrowers. You're supported on your

mission by a droid that acts as backup as well as a merchant facility to buy and sell the means to continue the fight.

While *Alien Syndrome* controls well and plays fine, you'll spend the majority of your time firing at colour variations of the same aliens down slightly different poorly-lit corridors, and if you're clever about how you allocate your stats, you can become practically invincible. *Alien Syndrome*'s far from a bad game, but it's also far from essential. ■ **Nick O'Shea**

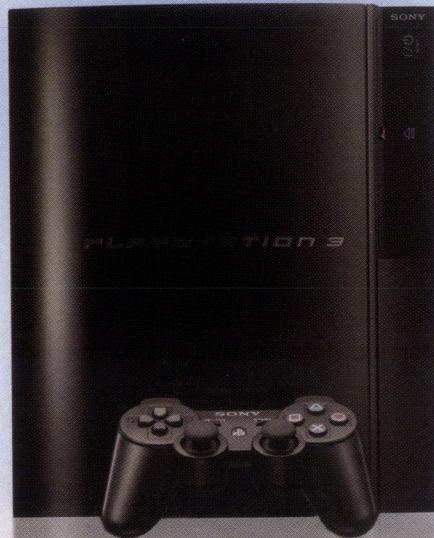
PROS:
■ Alien blastin' with RPG elements
■ Good control scheme

CONS:
■ Very repetitive
■ Too easy

OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

VERDICT: One to look for in the bargain bin, but not compelling enough to demand full price.

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DVD OF THE MONTH

KNOCKED UP (MA15+)

■ STARRING: Seth Rogen, Katherine Heigl, Paul Rudd, Leslie Mann, Jonah Hill
 ■ DIRECTORS: Judd Apatow



Director Judd Apatow has done the impossible; he's made a romantic comedy that guys will love, girls will love and, most importantly, isn't an insipid, paint-by-numbers love-in. Using many of the

same actors from his previous film *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* and his cult TV series' *Undeclared* and *Freaks & Geeks*, Apatow's cast of relative unknowns knock it out of the park.

Ben (Rogen) is a 23-year-old unemployed slacker living with his stoner mates (including *Superbad* star Jonah Hill). Alison (Heigl), also in her twenties, is eager and talented and

has just been given an on-camera role at E! Television. Going out to celebrate with her older sister Debbie (Mann) she meets the charming Ben, who she spends the night dancing with when her sister heads home. After a bout of awkward, drunk sex, Alison realises the man she brought home is not much more than an overgrown child and brushes him off. However, eight weeks later she discovers she's pregnant. She contacts Ben, and with occasional help from Debbie and her slightly aloof husband (Rudd), plus Ben's frat-boy

chums, they take the fast lane to a life they never planned for.

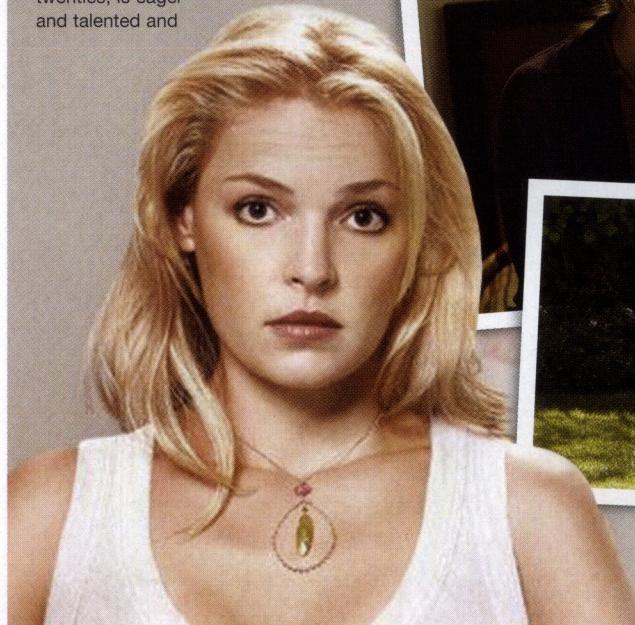
The cast is universally brilliant – Rogen does a fantastic job in his first stint as leading man and Heigl really sells it, particularly towards the end. Rudd is great as a hen-picked husband, Mann is superb and Ben's posse of friends consistently reap laughs.

Like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up* is unusually long for a comedy – but it isn't a problem as the pace really is near-perfect and, like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, there's far

more depth to the movie than the title suggests.

For all its crude humour and hilarious one-liners it offers some real poignant commentary on growing up, relationships, marriage, responsibility and becoming a parent.

VERDICT: Rude, raunchy, offensive... and straight from the heart. *Knocked Up* really is a gem of a movie, stuffed with blokey humour yet packing a sentimental wallop and the kind of character credibility comedies just don't normally boast. You can't afford to miss it, one of the best films of 2007.



MAN OF THE MOMENT

Asked to explain why his films seem to always strike a balance between R-rated vulgarity and wholesome sentimentality, Judd Apatow has a simple answer.

"I like movies that are, you know, uplifting and hopeful... and I like filth!"

The Emmy-award winning screenwriter, director and producer has really hit his stride with super-successful comedies like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up*. In fact, he has written, produced, and directed films that have grossed over \$700 million, and that's just in the US. *Knocked Up* earned around \$200 million worldwide (it cost only \$30 million to make).

He began performing stand-up when he was 17 before moving to Los Angeles and enrolling in the screenwriting program at University of Southern California. Apatow dropped out of USC after two years and moved into an apartment with comedian Adam Sandler. He began writing material for others instead of developing his own act and worked on *The Ben Stiller Show* and *The Larry Sanders Show*, as well as two short-lived TV series' of his own – *Undeclared* and *Freaks & Geeks*.

Apatow is married to actress Leslie Mann and has two daughters.



■ Beards. Honestly, they're so back

TV

SOUTH PARK - THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON (M)

■ **STARRING:** Trey Parker, Matt Stone, Isaac Hayes
■ **CREATORS:** Trey Parker, Matt Stone



Paramount is finally releasing all the seasons of *South Park* to date on DVD down under. The initial batch includes the first, second and tenth seasons. Since its 1997

debut *South Park* has become a truly relevant animated sitcom, characterised by its staunch refusal to offend anyone and its scathing satire and pop-culture parody. The first season features 13 episodes, most of which are rather memorable - including 'Cartman Gets an Anal Probe', 'Weight Gain 4000', 'Big Gay Al's Big Gay Boat Ride', 'Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo' and 'Cartman's Mom Is a Dirty Slut'.

VERDICT: Gloves-off comedy that's tough to tire of.

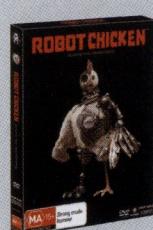


AS THERE WERE NO RUNNING 2009 MODEL CAMAROS, BUMBLEBEE WAS ACTUALLY CREATED BY SALEEN. WORKING WITH A PONTIAC GTO ALONG WITH DRAWINGS FROM GM, SALEEN BUILT A RUNNING "CAMARO" IN JUST 30 DAYS.

TV

ROBOT CHICKEN - SEASON TWO (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Seth Green, Breckin Meyer, Alex Borstein, Christian Slater, Mila Kunis, Macaulay Culkin, Bruce Campbell, Hulk Hogan, David Hasselhoff
■ **CREATORS:** Seth Green, Matt Senreich



In 2006 *Robot Chicken* won an Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation, and it just gets better. Stop-motion animation using clay and toys, standout skits from this season are plenty. Lindsay Lohan enters the world of *Highlander*, Vince Vaughn presents his new hit show 'Vince Vaughn Bangs Your Mom', Mario and Luigi accidentally stumble into the violent world of 'Grand Theft City', Hulk Hogan busts out of prison camp in 'Hogan's Heroes', Casper's brother is revealed as 'Jasper, the Douchebag Ghost' and much more.

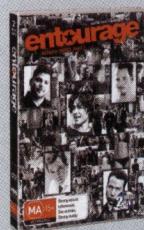
VERDICT: Infectiously funny.



TV

ENTOURAGE - SEASON THREE PART 2 (MA15+)

■ **STARRING:** Kevin Connolly, Adrian Grenier, Kevin Dillon, Jerry Ferrara, Jeremy Piven
■ **DIRECTOR:** Doug Ellin



Chronicling the rise of Vincent Chase up the A-list and the lives of his childhood friends from Queens, *Entourage* is kind of like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

for a younger crowd (and with more boobs). To be honest, star Adrian Grenier isn't really that compelling as leading man Vince - Kevin Dillon (brother of Matt Dillon) is far more impressive as the less successful brother of a superstar (which he is). It's Jeremy Piven, however, that shines as Vince's foul-mouthed agent Ari Gold (a role that won him an Emmy two years in a row).

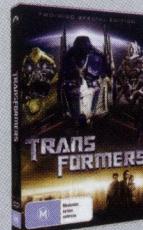
VERDICT: Sharp, rude, witty and ridiculously addictive.



SCI FI

TRANSFORMERS (M)

■ **STARRING:** Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox, Josh Duhamel, Tyrese Gibson, Rachael Taylor
■ **DIRECTOR:** Michael Bay



Having this man plundering the childhoods of generation Xers for properties to pimp on the big screen is like a red rag to a bull to many. However, Jane Austin this is not.

It's giant robots fighting giant robots. It's two hours of incredible action set pieces, and if Bay can do anything right, it's produce incredible action set pieces. It gets bogged down with a too many human characters and we could've done with less slapstick, but the CGI is off the reservation - from the triumphant arrival of Optimus Prime to Slipstream's dogfight with a squadron of F-35s. While the acting dips there's never a moment where you're unconvinced by the robotic spectacle.

VERDICT: Slick, big, brash and unavoidably entertaining.



DELIVERANCE (R18+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** John Boorman
■ **STARRING:** Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight



Deliverance is the story of four suburban professionals from Georgia who head out on a weekend canoe and camping trip. The weekend canoe and camping trip from hell. Notable for its 'Dueling Banjos' scene, which sets the tone perfectly for the danger ahead.

VERDICT: A classic, no doubt, but not really a Blu-ray must.



FACE/OFF (MA15+)

■ **DIRECTOR:** John Woo
■ **STARRING:** John Travolta, Nicolas Cage



FBI agent Sean Archer goes undercover as his worst enemy, terrorist-for-hire Castor Troy, using HIS ACTUAL FACE as his disguise. Things go awry when Troy wakes up and nicks Archer's face.

VERDICT: Brain-insultingly silly, *Face/Off* nonetheless boasts a hearty helping of decent action.



TROY (M)

■ **DIRECTOR:** Wolfgang Petersen
■ **STARRING:** Brad Pitt, Eric Bana, Brian Cox, Julian Glover, Nathan Jones



This sprawling war epic may have failed to step out of the shadow of Ridley Scott's superior *Gladiator* flick but it did still offer plenty of spectacular action and eye candy, as well as suitably engaging performances from Pitt and Bana.

VERDICT: More stylised than accurate but entertaining nonetheless.



DIE HARD (M)

■ **DIRECTOR:** John McTiernan
■ **STARRING:** Bruce Willis, Alan Rickman



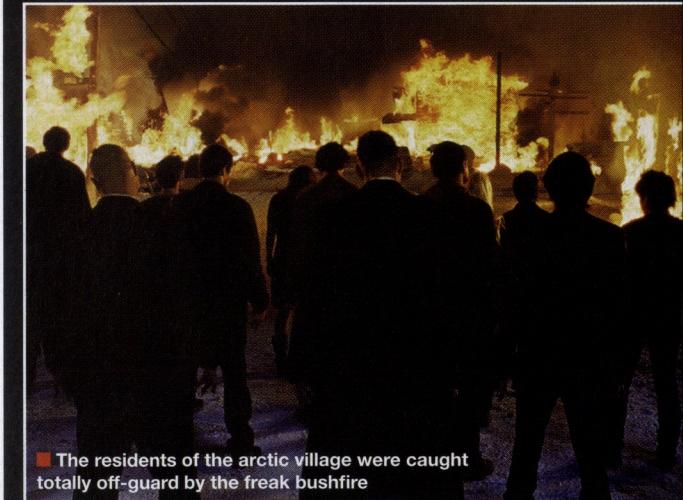
The movie that reinvented the action genre and launched Bruce Willis' career, *Die Hard* is considered by many the greatest action movie ever made. Seriously, we want John McClane to be our Dad. We're not even kidding.

VERDICT: Yippee ki yay...





■ Turns out vampires don't like having their arses slapped



■ The residents of the arctic village were caught totally off-guard by the freak bushfire

CINEMA

30 DAYS OF NIGHT (R18+)

■ Director: David Slade Starring: Josh Hartnett, Melissa George, Danny Huston, Ben Foster, Manu Bennett, Joel Tobeck, Craig Hall, Mark Boone, Mark Rendall, Kate O'Rourke

For 30 days every winter the isolated town of Barrow, Alaska is plunged into total darkness. It's a harsh, bitter time – and most of the residents head south for the duration. This winter, however, a mysterious group of strangers appears. As it happens, they're actually bloodthirsty vampires (of course) primed to take advantage of the constant darkness to feast on the town's remaining inhabitants. Barrow's Sheriff Eben (Josh Hartnett), his wife Stella (Melissa George) and an ever-shrinking bunch of survivors must do whatever it takes to last until daylight. Opens November 8.

COMING SOON

DEATHPROOF

(Rating TBC)

■ STARRING: Kurt Russell Quentin Tarantino's half of the Tarantino/Rodriguez double bill, *Grindhouse* – which wasn't released in Australia. Opens November 1

FRED CLAUS

(Rating TBC)

■ STARRING: Vince Vaughn Santa bails his brother Fred (Vaughn) from jail to work for him. Opens November 15

BALLS OF FURY

(Rating TBC)

■ STARRING: Dan Fogler Witness the unsanctioned, underground and unhinged world of extreme Ping-Pong. Also stars Christopher Walken. Opens November 22

BEOWULF

(Rating TBC)

■ STARRING: Ray Winstone A totally CGI film, like *The Polar Express*, is an epic fantasy from director, Robert Zemeckis. Also stars Anthony Hopkins, Angelina Jolie and John Malkovich. Opens November 29

BUZZ

The latest movie murmurs from home and abroad



JACKASS OF ALL TRADES

Jackass co-star Steve-O has reportedly announced on *The Howard Stern Show* that a third Jackass movie is in the works. The former clown, currently starring in his own reality TV show, *Dr. Steve-O*, claims he has been asked to rest up for *Jackass 3*, which he says will begin shooting in January.



EXTREME JUSTICE

The Justice League of America is coming to the big screen. The *Superman Returns* sequel has taken a back-seat to this massive project and Warner Bros. is currently in the process of casting its leads. Spandex-clad meat-heads such as Superman, Batman, the Flash and Aquaman feature, plus Wonder Woman.



KILLING PABLO

If *Entourage* has got you thinking a Pablo Escobar film is a good idea, you're not the only one. There are two currently in production. Oliver Stone's is based on Roberto Escobar Gavira's book *Mi Hermano Pablo*. The other is based on Mark Bowden's *Killing Pablo*. Joe Carnahan (*Narc*) will direct.



A NORSE IS A NORSE

Director of upcoming superhero flick *Thor* Matthew Vaughn has spilled a few beans on what we should expect. Apparently we ought to think of it like *Gladiator* infused with a little Norse mythology. Expect it to be a typical superhero origin flick, only with significantly increased attention to beards. Great, big Viking beards...



SHARP END

Some interesting information has surfaced regarding the X-Men spin-off flick *Wolverine*. It's already been reported that Hugh Jackman will be reprising his role as the short-tempered, spiky-fisted bad-arse but now it's been revealed the film is a prequel story, expanding on the exploits of Wolverine long-before he met Professor X – even before he got his claws. Consider our interest well and truly piqued...



INTERACTION

WIN!

Witness #4

Suspect #3

Suspect #2

Witness #3

ALPHA DOG PRIZE PACK

To celebrate the release of *Alpha Dog*, the hit new drama starring Justin Timberlake, Emile Hirsch, Sharon Stone and Bruce Willis, BLOCKBUSTER® is giving you the opportunity to win one of 10 *Alpha Dog* prize packs. Each fantastic pack includes an *Alpha Dog* t-shirt, *Alpha Dog* cap and Limited Collector's Edition DVD and CD soundtrack.

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You've seen the illustrious Sony Bravia... here's the competition...

TECH

WHAT IS...

HDMI Standing for High Definition Multimedia Interface, this fancy little cable removes all your audio visual worries by transferring all the information required on one (expensive) cable.

1080p While the '1080' refers to the fact that there are 1080 lines of horizontal pixels on the screen. The 'p' simply means that the image is progressively scanned, hence smoother.

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Samsung recently launched their new M8 series of Full HD TVs in a fanfare of publicity that would put Paris Hilton to shame. Unlike Paris, though, the Samsung is stacked to the rafters with useful features and technology that will keep it future-proof for a while yet.

But what does all this mean to those who want to just turn on the TV and enjoy gaming with decent picture and sound quality? Well, picture quality is sharp and impressive and the built in tuner works well. But the technology

that is meant to give a more realistic black level tends to over-compensate.

If playing games in 1080p is your bag, then the Samsung isn't a bad choice. But its impressive spec sheet doesn't necessarily translate to picture quality.

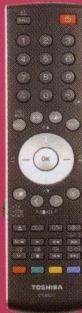
VERDICT: Great on paper, but not quite as good in real life. Still, a nice picture with a simple user interface.



PC INPUT Having a PC input is handy for those that wish to watch media directly from a PC, or even play games from the comfort of your couch. This input basically makes connecting your PC hassle free.

CONTRAST RATIO Kinda complicated. The contrast ratio basically informs you of the range of contrast your TV is capable of. If your TV's ratio is high, then it should be capable of dark blacks and scintillating whites.

REFRESH RATE We'll keep this simple, cause it can get hella complicated. In short, the lower the refresh rate, the smoother the image. For gaming we would recommend something lower than 12ms.



In detail

If your pad isn't astronomical in size, then this could possibly be the TV for you. A good-looking panel with performance that matches in both vision and sound. Despite its relative bulkiness, we guarantee you won't be disappointed...



916mm

298mm

TOSHIBA 37WL68A \$2,499

www.toshibaav.com.au

A 50-inch TV for \$5,000? But what if your pad can't quite fit such a majestic king-size display? Toshiba's relatively-minuscule 37-inch LCD panel might be the answer to your prayers, and save you some cash as well.

It looks nice and has some good stuff inside as well. The 100Hz display is definitely a plus for gaming – you won't miss a frame of *Heavenly Sword*, or *Call of Duty 4* – and there's also a PC input, two HDMI inputs and a decent 1,000:1 contrast ratio. None of that is necessarily groundbreaking, but for the price, it won't be breaking the bank either. The Toshiba is undoubtedly great value for money.

What is surprising for an LCD TV of this size

and price is the inclusion of some half-decent speakers. The stereo 10-watt noisemakers will leave you satisfied, with just enough bass for movies and games without dirtying the sound-quality waters.

Although not full 1080p the Toshiba – unlike the Pioneer – is able to downscale 1080p picture from HD-DVD or Blu-ray players for that little extra bit of picture quality that nobody can actually see but everybody wants.

VERDICT: Not the biggest of screens and not the nicest of designs, but this will get the job done nonetheless.



WHAT IS...

HD TUNER An HD Tuner allows your TV to receive and display the few television shows that broadcast in High Definition. Luckily most new televisions come with one as standard, but if it doesn't never fear. Sony's new Play TV has two tuners – one spare for recording.

COMPONENT Component cables basically serve the same purpose as a HDMI cable, but have largely been superceded. Although component cables are generally capable of producing the same resolution image, there is less information loss with HDMI.

SHARP AQUOS LC42PD7X \$4,399

www.sharp.net.au

If ugly was the new beautiful then we would have ourselves an outright winner! Sadly, however, as we all know, ugly is the new ugly, and that ain't ever gonna change...

The exterior of this LCD resembles a CRT monitor that has been crushed in a car accident but by some miracle has retained a perfect screen. Thankfully, Hi-Def TVs are like books, you can't judge them by their covers. Switch this on and most of your exterior aesthetic troubles will float away into pure 1080p bliss... until you switch it off again.

Aside from Full HD, this panel also boasts a 6,000:1 contrast ratio, integrated HD tuner and a 6ms response time.

The grass is certainly greener on this panel, and when those grass covered super soldiers tear up the turf, you'll be ducking for cover thanks to the super sharp picture and

refined HD tuner.

Picture isn't everything though, so you'll be happy to know the two channel 15 watt speakers are part of this rather Sharp (pardon the pun) package. While they don't have the kind of high end clarity of separate surround sound speakers, they deliver a performance well above the average, especially for watching Blu-ray movies.

At \$4,399 for 42-inches, you'll have to live in the box it came in to afford it. And be aware that there's no PC input for those wanting to ruin their eyes by typing a Word document on a 42-inch screen.

VERDICT: Oh dear. If only Sharp had some inclination that aesthetics play a part in purchasing decisions...

★★★★★

In detail

This is the perfect TV for those who still think CRT is better quality than a flat panel but would like to get one anyway. Its chunky design is as likely to win a beauty contest as old leather face Kratos from *God of War*, despite the fact that it possesses a similar level of awesome inside.



1031mm

292mm

733mm

AQUOS



SHARP

POWER SLEEP DPC DVB

CRT A 'Cathode ray tube' or, in layman's terms, an old school TV. This is the outdated tech that older televisions use to create the lower res image on screen. Some people (idiots) think that CRT TVs create a better image.

UPSCALING Since DVDs and most PS2 games are rendered at a lower resolution than most LCDs are capable of displaying, most decent DVD players (and the PS3) are capable of 'upscale', cleaning the image up.

DOWNSCALING But on the other hand, if your TV doesn't support 1080p, some TVs or Blu-ray players (again including the PS3) will scale the image down to suit your lower resolution screen.



In detail

Can we complain about anything with this TV? Well, yes, the speaker quality could be better. But at \$2,749 you can afford to go out and buy some better ones, anyway. Even the Panasonic's remote is stylish!



1020mm



320mm

PANASONIC TH-42PX70A \$2,749

www.panasonic.com.au

If you're looking for something beautiful to hang on your wall, you can't go wrong with this TV. It was the thinnest panel on test by a country mile, with looks good enough to make Lote Tuquira turn pink. The matte-black finish and elegant, simple design is a good reason to buy this TV in itself. Switch it on and a few more reasons become obvious.

Having the best HD tuner in the test was one of them. It didn't miss a beat in our poor reception area, rating all of the channels at 90 percent or above, and the simple menu system and remote control made it a breeze to set up when compared with other TVs.

Picture quality was also stunning. You can get caught up checking out the crazy little car

details in *MotorStorm*, so clear is the picture. Although it's not full 1080p, it is completely capable of downscaling and does a mighty fine job of it too. Upscaling is also in its repertoire, managing to take your lower res DVDs and make them beautiful again.

Sadly, audio quality is a huge letdown, which sees the title being tragically stolen away in the dying seconds. Still, for the price you could possibly buy new speakers anyway.

VERDICT: Sleek, sexy and seriously sensational. If you want art and a TV but can only afford one, this is the answer. The TV that can do (almost) everything.

★★★



CHEATS

Get the winning edge
with *OPS*' tricky cheats

PS3

HEAVENLY SWORD

The Animation Series

Heavenly Sword contains the first two parts of an animated prologue that tells the history behind the sword. Two more animated videos can be unlocked by collecting glyphs throughout the game...

'Guardians of the Sword'

Obtain 47 glyphs

'The Legend of the Sword'

Obtain 7 glyphs

Unlockable Combos

These are the unlockable aerial combos. Combos can be unlocked by obtaining the required amount of glyphs throughout your adventure.

Bladed Downfall

Obtain 28 glyphs

Falling Blossom

Obtain 61 glyphs

Flying Angel

Obtain 16 glyphs

Soaring Embrace

Obtain 54 glyphs

Blade of the Devil

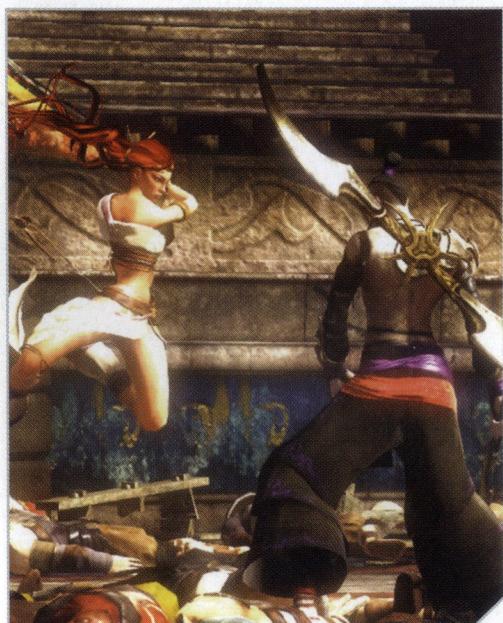
Obtain 65 glyphs

Hell's Envy

Obtain 14 glyphs

Raising Hell

Obtain 65 glyphs



PS2

STUNTMAN: IGNITION

Cheats

Go to 'Extras' on the main screen and once you are in begin entering passwords to get the following supremely cool cheats in *Stuntman: Ignition*.

coolprop

Three props in stunt creator mode

nobleman

All items unlocked for construction mode

gfxmodes

Several new camera effects and styles

kungfoopete

Unlock all cheats

iceage

Unlock ice wheels cheat

thedupe

Unlock nitro addiction cheat

Hollywood

Unlocks Slow-Mo Cool, Thrill Cam cheats

Imtarex

Unlocks Touchable cheat

Wearefrozen

Unlocks Vision Switcher

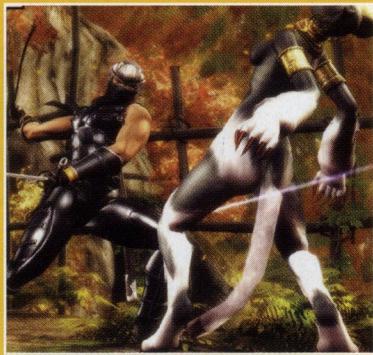
All cheats

To unlock all the cheats in the game, simply become the #1 ranked Stuntman, aka the Legend ranking. Once you do so, go to your options, then extra menu and you will have all the cheats unlocked. Just remember that getting #1 does not require five stars on every different mission, so don't be too afraid of this somewhat daunting task. Just become the top Stuntman in the biz, and the cheats will be there at your disposal...

CHEAT OF THE MONTH

The pick of the bunch for the cheaters among you...

Man! *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* is absolutely bust-a-gut, loosen that belt a couple of notches, full of extra content. Not only can you download some new content from the PlayStation Store, but employ this nifty little cheat and you can also unlock five new missions in the aptly named 'Mission Mode'. All you have to do is push **↑, ↓, ←, →, ↑, ↗, ↙** and these extra missions are yours...



PSP

FF TACTICS: THE WAR OF THE LIONS

Get Luso from FFTA2

To get Luso in your party, do the following steps:

1. Go to the Zekalus Desert after the Orbonne Monastery battles in Chapter 3.

2. Once there, watch the FMV and complete the following battle.

3. Congratulations, Luso is yours!

Get Balthier from FFXII

1. When you reach chapter four, head over to the mining town of Gollund.

2. Check the "Rash of Thiefs" rumor from the tavern.

3. Drop by the merchant city of Dorts' tavern and read the "A Call for Guards" rumor.

4. Leave town, and you'll automatically enter a battle.

5. Win with the help of Balthier, and he'll join the party.

See your monster's face before its birth...

On the editing screen, put an egg in the bottom row. Place the cursor on top and press right or left slowly or rapidly. You should be able to get a glimpse of the monster's face that's going to be born.

WTF?

SKATE

The *Tony Hawk's* franchise has always been legendary for its wealth of crazy unlockable characters. From what we'd seen of the new reigning extreme sports game *SKATE*, however, EA seemed to have failed miserably in this department...

Until now... after playing *SKATE* hardcore, and breaking craploads of bones, we unlocked *this* guy – 'Dem Bonez'. If you break every bone in your body at least three times, you actually unlock a legitimate Skateboarding Skeleton. Careful, he's a bit fragile...



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FACTORY

Moderate Violence

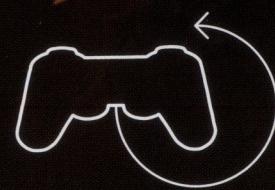
M

Controller obeys your every command, as will a giant, flying, fire-breathing beast on an epic scale. Now that is living. Turn, dive, swoop, thrust – whatever movement your hands make with the SIXAXIS™ Wireless Controller, the dragon you're flying will follow. Without any wires to hold you back you're given total freedom to move. The SIXAXIS™ Wireless Controller obeys your every command, as will a giant, flying, fire-breathing beast on an epic scale. Now that is living.

YOU TURN. THE DRAGON TURNS.

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18



DATABASE

All the games that matter on the PS3, PS2 and PSP!

FUTURE WATCH

The PS3 games to grab in the coming months

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

Release: December 2007



This game makes us want to pack in our desk jobs, hire a spunky blonde assistant and hunt for lost treasure. It also makes us want to shoot pirates, although we're generally up for a bit of that at the best of times.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

Release: Early 2008



Killer FPS action from the creators of popular Xbox 360 shooter *Gears of War*. Yeah, put us down for a few of those. Besides, it has hoverboards. In what situation are hoverboards NOT cool? Hint: Never.

ROCK BAND

Release: Early 2008



Soooo... *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*... well, it's pretty good and all... but we need *Rock Band* in our lives, man. We don't know how we're going to take watching those smug American's get it months before us. No beer and no *Rock Band* make OPS go something something...

GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

Release: TBA 2008



The big wheel down at the cracker factory, the master of its domain, the big kahuna, the boss of bosses... wait a minute. We said all this last month. Damn it. Man, it's gonna look pretty bad

when we recycle all those for the review as well. At least, it's not out until next year. There's a strong chance you'll have forgotten it by then.

PS3 TOP 20



MOTORSTORM

Fast, hard, dirty and utterly exhilarating, *MotorStorm* is essential for everyone's PS3. Not even the lack of split-screen can detract from this fantastic racer.



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

This Vegas adventure is definitely worth a look. A slick, gorgeous, accessible and utterly entertaining tactical shooter.



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

The perfect launch title for PS3, and possibly the best console FPS ever made. The massive 40-player online deathmatches are more fun than you can imagine.



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Obsessive and gripping both online and off, *Splinter Cell Double Agent* will gobble you up. Obtain.



THE ELDER SCRROLLS IV: OBLIVION

One of the deepest adventures we've ever laid eyes on. Simply put – awesome. This is arguably the only RPG you'll need for some time to come.



VIRTUA TENNIS 3

Still the best tennis game around, but the lack of any significant new features is a downer. Still, it's some of the best fun four people can have on one PS3.



SKATE

A groundbreaking title that resets the bar for sports games in general. It kickflips *Tony Hawk's* to the curb with its simple approach. Irresistibly addictive and downright essential.



NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

Ninja Gaiden Sigma is a treasure trove of gaming goodness. Dig it up now. It's tougher than a coffin nail. Not even Chuck Norris can beat this sucker.



WARHAWK

There is no better multiplayer game on PS3 right now. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night and smoother than a glass of Guinness, it's a superior piece of software.



ENCHANTED ARMS

Enchanted Arms is the first proper Japanese RPG for the PS3 and it's by no means a disappointment, but it's a quirky game.



HEAVENLY SWORD

Heavenly Sword is one of the best games we've seen in ages. A beautiful, yet deep, masterpiece and an awesomely enjoyable ride, albeit a rather short one.



TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

A tense, realistic shooter. Well suited for the armchair generals amongst you, but *Rainbow Six Vegas* is better.



COLIN McRAE DIRT

Colin McRae DIRT is an ambitious, accessible racer with a surprising amount of depth. The best rally sim ever? You better believe it. Rest in peace big guy.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Still one of the best two-player games around, with visuals that will knock the wind (and most of the teeth) out of you. Great online too.



THE DARKNESS

Tentacles and guns – the perfect combination. Stunning, original and gory as hell. You'd have to be dim to miss *The Darkness*.



VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

Virtua Fighter 5 is as hardcore as fighting games get. Serious fans – start rolling up your sleeves. Tough to master but more rewarding than *Tekken*.



STUNTMAN: IGNITION

The vehicular equivalent of a 10-hour-long orgasm. Gentlemen, start your boners. *Stuntman: Ignition* succeeds in upending the original in every way.



SEGA RALLY

Not so much a revolution as one hell of a good renovation. Gives you that same ol' feeling of the original, just not too much more. "Game Over Yeaahhh..."



MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

It's next gen as all hell. On PS2 it was damn good – on PS3 it's a must-have! Great co-op and an exhaustive list of Marvel's greatest superheroes to control.



STRANGLEHOLD

Won't set the videogame world on fire but packs plenty of frantic fun. The destructive environments build on the genre created by the Woo-influenced *Max Payne* series.

PS3

ARMORED CORE 4

A far better alternative to *Mobile Suit Gundam*.



BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

It's not without its flaws, but you could do a lot worse.

BLAZING ANGELS II: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII

Not quite the ace of aces at this stage.

CALL OF DUTY 3

A solid but surprisingly unspectacular shooter.

DEF JAM: ICON

Somehow it's won its way into our hearts. Stupid fun.

FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER

Slick and fun. If only it was about EIGHT TIMES LONGER.

F.E.A.R.

A chilling ride but the graphics could've been a sharper.

FOLKLORE

Great graphics, memorable characters. A sweet surprise.

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

Brim with potential but fails to live up to it.

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

Plodding gameplay that belongs on the Atari 2600.

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Decent, but its chore-like structure will bore most.

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

A top bit of racing fluff, although it's all a tad generic.

LAIR

A massive let-down. It feels rushed and unfinished.

MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE

A dinosaur of an FPS – wait for *Brothers in Arms* instead.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: TARGET IN SIGHT

A rubber Godzilla of a title. What a pipe blocker!

NBA LIVE 08

Best of its kind. B-ball devotees will adore it, guaranteed.

NBA STREET HOMECOURT

The brashest, most addictive arcade basketball game yet.

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

Solid, but *ProStreet* is going to murder it.

NHL 2K7

A snappy, good looking hockey game.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END

A shallow slash 'em up. Ye be warned.

RIDGE RACER 7

Sexy, gravity defying – like Jessica Alba bungee jumping.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

This is an absolutely terrible game. Avoid at ALL cost.

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

Seriously, buy *SKATE*. We're begging you.

TRANSFORMERS: THE GAME

Worth a nostalgic one-night-stand, but that's it.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KNIGHTDOM

Stick to *Oblivion* – no ballads will be sung of this.

PS2

CRASH OF THE TITANS

A valiant attempt to breathe some life into the old franchise, but it fails on a few levels. There's just nothing much going on here.

FINAL FANTASY XII

This is the most superbly crafted RPG out there. You'd be completely mad to miss this one.

GOD OF WAR II

There is no reason not to own this game. Whack on some pants and go buy it now.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

No multiplayer or co-op, but a big improvement on *GTA: Liberty City Stories*. A fitting last hurrah. Can you feel it, coming in the air tonight?

GUITAR HERO ENCORE: ROCKS THE 80s

At its best as good as *Guitar Hero* ever was, but only a handful of decent songs and no bonus tracks makes \$70 a tad steep.

ROGUE GALAXY

The send-off to the PS2's RPGs that *God of War II* was to the action genre. *Final Fantasy* who?

RUGBY 08

Barely a whisker of improvement in two years – not worth it if you own *Rugby 06*.

SBK-07: SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2007

A realistic and credible take on motorcycle racing, highly recommended for bike buffs.

SINGSTAR '90s

Features decent slab of '90s hits. Could've done with some better quality Australian tracks.

VALKYRIE PROFILE 2: SILMERIA

Gorgeous and strange, *Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria* has a lot to offer the willing.



STEVEN SPIELBERG

Always hovering around E3, although he may have just been in it for the booth babes. It's the shady facial hair...

PSP

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

Not only is this a brilliant game, it's arguably the second best *GTA* game available next to *San Andreas*. Get it now.

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

Forget *Acid*, this is the game *Metal Gear* fans have been waiting for.

MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM 2

One of the finest games on the PSP to date.



JACK BLACK

Word is he'll kick your arse at any racing game you choose. Then he'll spend the next few minutes trash talking you about it. In song.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

Fun, easy to play and challenging enough to offer real longevity.

RICKY PONTING 2007 PRESSURE PLAY

It's decent, but it doesn't have the depth of the PS2 version. No commentary? No test matches? What gives?

V8 SUPERCARS 3: SHOOTOUT

It looks good, it sounds good and it has a stack of options – but the handling is more arcade than sim.

WIPEOUT PULSE

Fast, furious and not for the faint of heart. Bad-arse racing action sporting a solid challenge. *Wipeout* fans: aquire.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Great moments in PlayStation history remembered!



THE GAME: Resident Evil 4

THE CONSOLE: PlayStation 2

THE YEAR: 2005

THE MOMENT: This one has been a while coming. Arguably the best pure action game on PS2, and the only game that, for us, has ever come close to shunting *GTA: San Andreas* from the top of the pile, *Resident Evil 4* is a pulsing, white-knuckle banshee of a game from start to finish. There is, however, one magic moment that deserves mentioning above all the rest – the first level.

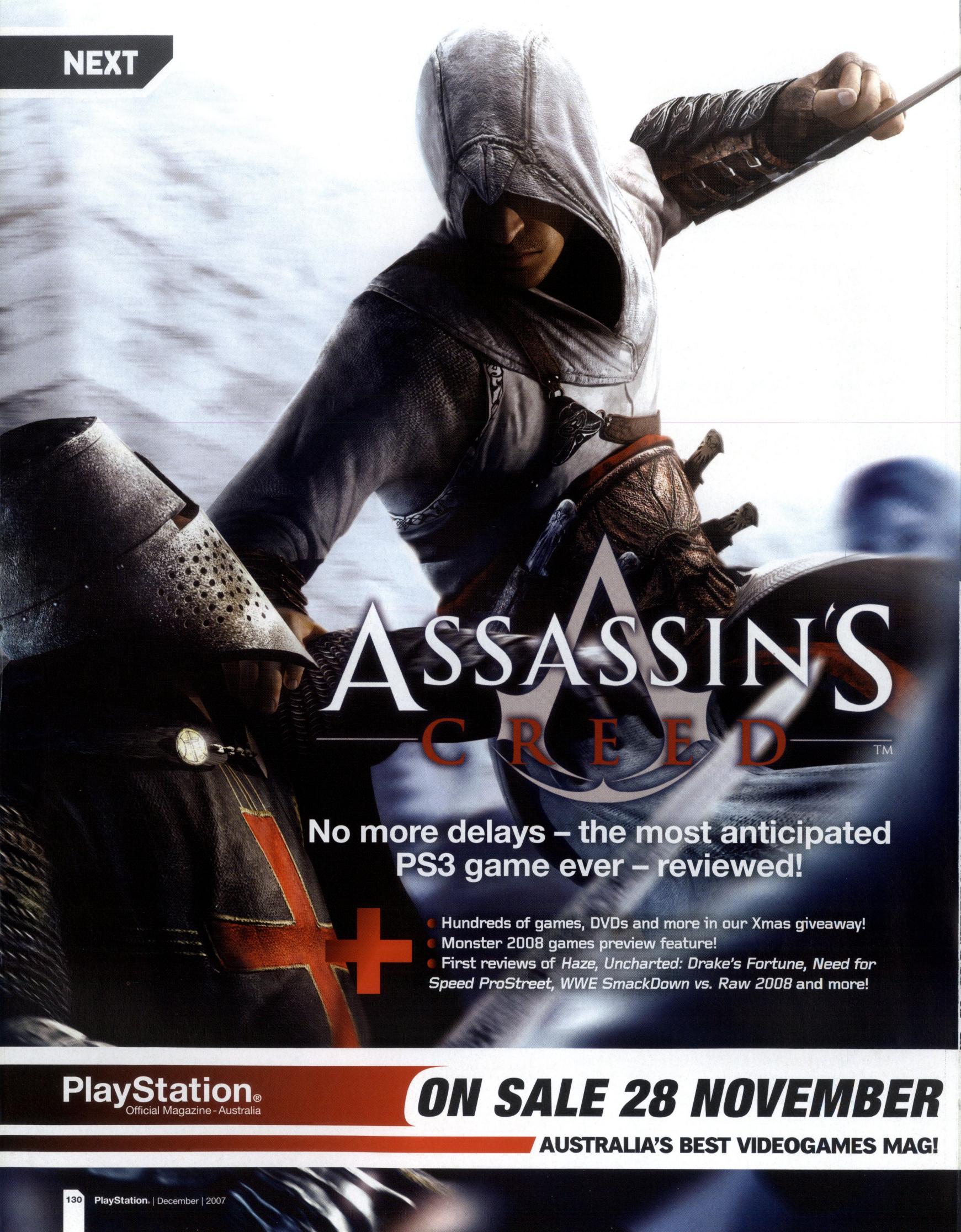
The opening village sequence in *Resident Evil 4* is easily one of the best openings for any videogame. Ever.

Most games start with a fuse. *Resident Evil 4* started with the explosion.

Instead of easing you in slowly, Capcom tosses you straight in the deep end. The result is a breathless, heart-stopping, adrenaline-charged few minutes where you're fighting for your life almost immediately after beginning the game. You're given a brief few moments to absorb your surroundings. You spy a smouldering bonfire up ahead, the remains of an unfortunate cop roasting slowly above it. Sneaking into the village unnoticed you're sprung by an irate villager, and after reasoning doesn't work you double-tap him in the skull. It's at this point when all hell breaks loose. Waves of homicidal villagers mob you on the street, so you dive through a nearby window and jam the door with a piece of furniture. Outside, however, you hear the gurgle of a rusty chainsaw wielded by a sack-headed maniac getting closer and closer. Crack! The blade chews through the door. Any second he'll be inside, your head will be his and your entrails will be zombie chow. You bolt upstairs, knock down a ladder and continue the fight outdoors. You've barely got time to reflect, but this is horror reinvented.

It's all over nearly as quickly as it began, and before you know it you're standing alone in the dusty street. But nothing is the same. *Resident Evil 4* changed the game, and action had been redefined.

NEXT



ASSASSIN'S CREED™

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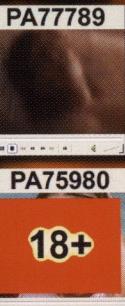
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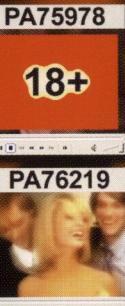
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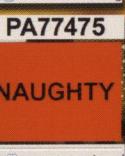
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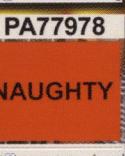
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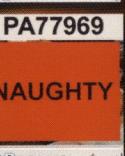
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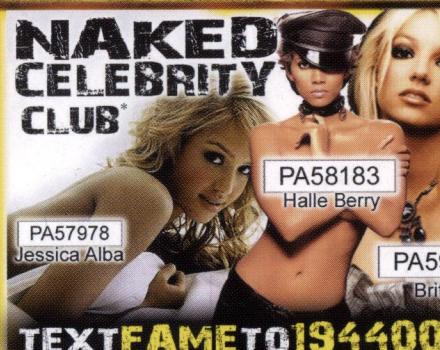
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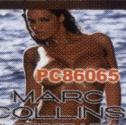
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| PA43539 | PA46994 | Timbaland Feat. Kel Hillson - THE WAY I ARE |
| PA43591 | PA47008 | Rihanna - Shut Up And Drive |
| PA43349 | PA46027 | Fall Out Boy - Thanks For The Memories |
| PA43960 | PA47007 | Matchbox Twenty - HOW FAR WE'VE COME |
| PA43561 | PA47014 | Good Charlotte - The Dance Floor Anthem |
| PA43889 | PA47011 | Ricki-Lee - Cant Touch It |
| PA43333 | PA46000 | Mika - Love Today |
| PA43537 | PA46992 | Avril Lavigne - When Your Gone |
| PA43927 | PA47049 | The Foo Fighters - Pretender |
| PA46981 | PA47017 | Plain White T's - HEY THERE DELILAH |
| PA43669 | PA47017 | 50 Cent Feat Justin Timberlake - Ayo Technology |
| PA43969 | PA47017 | Shannon Noll - Loud |
| PA43312 | PA43301 | Alex Gaudino - Destination Calabria |
| PA43520 | PA48402 | My Chemical Romance - Teenagers |

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